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winter. Not quite, and yet he did. I will explain. During the cold months of the year, the trees and bushes and hedgerows being all denuded of their foliage, Fred could see many an old nest which he had completely failed to find in summer, and thus discover some of the building secrets of the bird to which it belonged.

"Ho, ho!" Fred would say when he found one of these, "it is there you are, is it? And I wore my shoes out looking for you all last season. Very well, Mr. New-Specimen, I'll know where to find you when spring comes round."

Often, then, his road led him through dark and gloomy pine woods, or along the banks of "drumlie" streams, or away across wild and wide hobgoblin moors, or even up high hillsides, waist-deep in the rankest of heather.

Trespassing? Yes; but then Fred was quite as well known as Gilbert Bruce the cat, and quite as much a favourite with keepers, farmers, and even with lairds, as pussy was.

I could relate many a strange little adventure that Fred had during these wanderings of his, some of them amusing enough, as when a long-horned Highland bull lifted him up from behind and threw him right over a stone wall. As Fred was going that way anyhow and was not a bit hurt—albeit his nether garments were slightly damaged—he had simply gathered himself up, walked on, and said nothing about it.

But one of these adventures had a bearing on the boy's future life, and this I must relate.

This adventure took place on the Packman Moor, a wide stretch of heatherland and bog that lay some three miles to the westward of Kildeer Farm. It was towards the end of January, and consequently within about a week of the time when he should have to leave school for ever.

The weather was open. The oldest wife in the parish failed to remember such a mild season. Of course they added that people would have to ~~pay~~ for it in the month of May. This was likely enough, but meanwhile here was an almost cloudless sky without an air of frost, balmy south winds blowing. The blue-green buds coming out on the honeysuckle hedgerows, the pea-green burgeons threatening to appear on the larches, tassels swinging from the hazels with wee, wee crimson flowers beneath, specks of silvery, down upon the willows, and young leaves upon the elder. And positively the laverocks¹ were singing, and the hoody crows had gone to the woods to get ready their nests.

Fred had meant to cross the Packman Moor quite early in the evening, but reclining for a short time on the soft green moss by the banks of the Kelpie burn he had spied a fine otter. The great brute had not seemed to notice him. His beautiful head, sleek as a seal's, had appeared out of a pool, fish in mouth, and

¹ Laverocks = larks.



CHAPTER XI.

THE SUMMER-HOUSE.

WHAT a strange-looking little house!" thought Lilly, "and what a strange-looking old man!"

Perhaps he was, but he improved on acquaintance. He was neither very wrinkled nor very ugly, and the smile that illumined his face as he bade them welcome, caused Lilly to take to him at once. He made them sit down, and walked slowly out to get more firing. Then brother and sister had a look round them. Everything was exceedingly plain, but there was some considerable degree of comfort about the one room after all. Everything was scrupulously clean too. *But* Lilly smiled as she noticed two clucking hens sitting on eggs in the far corner of the room. They looked pale about the face, but exceedingly serious, and took no notice of anything.

A great black cat, however, jumped out of the old man's bed and on to Lilly's knee, settled himself, and commenced to sing.

Old Donald laughed when he returned with an armful of peat and wood. "So Tom has taken to you,

Never mind, Koakie was a bird, if not of the brightest plumage, certainly of the brilliantest talents. His powers of mimicry, and motion-making with head and neck, were truly marvellous, and would have drawn tears of laughter from a forty-year-old mule.

He hopped now, or rather danced up and down his perch, calling out in rapid tones: "Koakie wants his breakfast. Is this a hotel? Koakie wants a bit o' braid (bread). Come on with Koakie's breakfast. Koakie wants a bit o' sugar. Play up. Play up. Hooch!" (This last was a wild Irish war-cry apparently partly whistle and partly shriek.) Then in a louder key, "You're a rascal—a r—r—rascal, you are, you are, you ARE."

"My conscience!" said Jeannie, who had stolen in unperceived; "as sure's death, Freddy, I'm frichtened. That bird's no canny. O, Freddy, send him back to the big black toon o' Lunnon."

"Play up, you r—r—rascal, play up, play up. Koakie's here. Hooch! Aha! ha, ha, ha!"

"O, listen," cried Jeannie, "to his eldritch screams o' laughter! Freddy, Freddy, if he's no the deil himsel'—goodness be near us—he is kith and kin till him. I'm aff."

"No, Jeannie, no. Wait till you see Koakie dance." Fred opened the door and out hopped Koakie with another Irish "Hooch!" He jumped upon a table. Fred whistled a jig to him, and off he went into one of the drollest wildest dances it is possible to imagine, hopping

TO
MRS. E. PHILLIPS,
OF CULVERDEN CASTLE, TUNBRIDGE WELLS,
HONORARY SECRETARY TO THE S.P.C.A. IN THAT DISTRICT,
THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED
WITH FEELINGS OF THE HIGHEST RESPECT
BY
THE AUTHOR.

TWIXT SCHOOL AND COLLEGE:

A TALE OF SELF-RELIANCE.

BY

GORDON STABLES, C.M., M.D., R.N.,

Author of "The Hermit Hunter of the Wilds."

*WITH EIGHT FULL-PAGE ILLUSTRATIONS BY
W. PARKINSON.*



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TO THE READER.

Young people often ask when reading a book, "Is it all true?" Regarding the main features of the present story I may answer boldly: "Almost every character in it is sketched from the life, and this refers not only to my human heroes, but to those of the lower creation also. Fred Hallam himself and his sister Lilly had their counterparts in real life. Old Donald, Duncan the naturalist, honest Scotch Sandie, little Borlem and Jeannie his sister, lived and talked just as they talk if they don't live in these pages. Willie the starling, Dick the Poet, Bellack the cow, Daddy the cavy, Torlath the collie, Gibbie the cat, Gael the Aberdeen terrier, and Koakie, the marvellous South Australian cockatoo, were all pets of my own. And starling and terrier, cavy, cat, canary, collie, cow, and cockatoo, each and all, lived and moved and had their being not so long ago.

As to my brief pictures of student life at Aberdeen University, some of my old class-fellows will recognize their truthfulness. Little do English students know how "deeply and dearly" Scotch lads in the far north

often pay for their education. Many and many a worthy minister who to-day "wags his pow in a poopit" suffered and struggled as did Fred Hallam, which only proves, I think, the virtue of self-reliance and the truth of the proverb,

Where there's a *will* there's a *way*.

GORDON STABLES.

Twyford, Berks.

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TWIXT SCHOOL AND COLLEGE.

APTER I.

MORNING AT KILDEER FARM.

OUNG FRED HALLAM laughed aloud that morning as he sat with his sister at breakfast. This seemed all the more strange, because there was apparently nothing particular to laugh about. No one was present at the table besides his sister and himself, for both his father and mother had finished their morning meal for some time. The latter had gone about her usual avocations, while the former was seated in an easy-chair by the fire, quietly reading his newly-arrived weekly newspaper.

Just before breaking into that merry, musical laugh of his, Fred had been unusually silent, sitting with his head bent forward, gazing abstractedly into the plate of oatmeal porridge he was discussing, as if mentally puzzling out a problem in Euclid.

He had made quick work with the porridge, nevertheless. The porridge, when placed before him by

little maid of all work, was in the room over the full moon; but Fred had soon reduced that full moon to a last quarter, and then to a mere semistar or new moon, and finally that had disappeared, and as he pushed away his plate he had laid aside.

Lilly, his sister, looked inquiryingly up at him over her cup of not over-strong tea, but said nothing, for it was no uncommon thing for Fred to burst out laughing at his own thoughts.

His father glanced up for a moment from the perusal of his newspaper.

"Fred, lad," he said, "I'm afraid you'll be late for school."

"Father," replied Fred, "if the state of the kitchen clock is to be depended on, there is no foundation for your fears."

"What a droll way the boy talks!" said his mother, coming in with his cup of tea. "Couldn't you just say, 'I don't think I shall, father.'"

"Fred's a whimsical lad," his father added. "But I don't mind him being droll; he is good at his lessons."

"Jeannie!" cried the boy, for the kitchen was within easy hail of the breakfast-room; "Jeannie, what's the time there?"

"The minute hand's on four," replied Jeannie, after a pause for meditation.

Jeannie never could get much nearer telling the clock than that. She left you to guess where the hour hand was, and make your own calculations.

"Minute hand on four, father—that is 9.20. if I left here at 9.30 I could walk the two miles by 10 but I don't mean budging away from this old domicile till 9.40, because the ground is hard with frost, and I mean to run all the way and skate the rest. Mother, I could have eaten a lot more porridge to-day. They were nice, though hardly thick enough. Did you try a horse-shoe on them?"¹

"Don't be silly, child. Finish your breakfast on cakes and butter and be off."

"Cakes and butter and be off!" laughed Fred, "Lilly, my dear, pass the 'be off.' But, by the by, Lill, you never asked me what I was laughing at that time. Jeannie!"

"Yes, Freddie."

"Watch the minute hand and sing out when it's on seven."

• "Well," said Lilly, "what were you laughing about?"

"Why, about that droll story Auntie told us last night, of the fool of a fellow with the basket of crockery, who put it down on the path and leant his back against the wall like a sick dog who wanted to bark, and began to build castles in the air and count his chickens before they were hatched; and imagined himself making a fortune just after the fashion of rolling a snow-ball in a thaw, till it gets so big you can't move it. And how this fool of a fellow imagined himself getting richer and richer and richer, till at last

¹ The Scotch always talk of porridge in the plural number.

Princess came and knelt before him and prayed him to marry her, and how he spurned her with a kick, and—ha! ha! ha!—broke all the basket of crockery. Now, Lilly, princesses do not do such things except in old-fashioned stories; but if I'd been that fellow I wouldn't have spurned the beautiful princess. I would have married—”

“Freddie, boy,” cried his mother, “here are your books and your plaid. It may snow before night, so you better have the plaid.”

“Thank you, mother; you are always mindful.”

Fred made haste now to finish his breakfast. “By the by, though, Lilly, you didn't hear the story about the miller, the mule, and the prince that grandfather told me last night. It is more likely to be true than the other one. Let me see, now, if I could tell it. Yes, mother, half a cup. Jeannie, how's the clock?”

“Minute hand close on six, Freddie.”

“Well, Lill, once upon a time there was a miller who went to the market to sell his mule because he had got so poor—the miller, I mean, not the mule—that he couldn't keep him. And it was a very pretty mule, with long, long ears, a short, glossy coat, and a long, straight back, only he was so fond of kicking that, if there was nothing else behind him, he used to kick at the clouds.”

“What a wicked mule!” said Lilly.

“Yes, Lilly; but listen. There was to be a great and very wealthy prince at the market that day, com-

ing to buy a mule, because, though he was very great and very rich, he was also very niggardly and mean and suspicious, and he wouldn't trust any servant he had to buy a mule for him for fear he would be cheated.

— “Well, Lill, as soon as he saw the miller's mule he took a fancy to him, and walked round him and round him several times, while all the while the miller kept stuffing the mule with nice, green, flowering tares, for fear he might strike out and kick the prince's hat and feathers off. The prince saw that he was a very pretty mule, so he said to the miller:

“How much do you want for that ugly brute?”

“O! nothing!” replied the miller. “You can have the mule for nothing if you buy his shoes.”

“Then the prince laughed and thought the miller was a fool.

“Well,” he said, “how much for the shoes?”

“Not much either,” replied the miller. “My wife said she would pull my ears if I brought the mule back and no money, so I'm determined to sell to spite th' old 'oman. Well, prince, there are eight holes in every shoe. I'll take a doit¹ for the first hole, and go on doubling till we reckon up all the holes.”

“The prince soon reckoned up the first shoe thus: First hole a doit, second hole a farthing, third a half-penny, fourth a penny, fifth twopence, sixth fourpence, seventh eightpence, eighth sixteenpence.

¹ Doit=old Scottish coin, value about half a farthing.

"‘Why,’ he said to himself, ‘the first shoe is only one shilling and fourpence, and the second only begins with two and eightpence. The fellow *must* be a simpleton.’

“‘I say, my man.’ He spoke out loud enough now to let all the crowd hear him, and they all laughed. ‘I say, my man, do you know what I think you are?’

“‘No,’ said the miller, scratching his head and looking up at the weather-cock.

“‘I take you for a fool.’ The crowd laughed aloud.

“‘Do you really?’ said the miller. ‘Just what my old ‘oman says I am.’

“The crowd laughed louder.

“‘Well,’ Mr. Fool,’ cried the prince, ‘I’ll buy the mule’s shoes and take the mule for nothing. Your own price, Mr. Jackass—a doit for the first hole, and thirty-two times doubled.’

“So the mule was handed over to the prince’s man, and the miller and the prince sat down on a stone to reckon up.

“When they came to the end of the holes in the first shoe, and found it was only one and fourpence, the prince laughed and chuckled; when they came to the end of the holes in the second shoe, and found it came to seventeen pounds and five shillings, the miller began to grow very merry; but there wasn’t a smile on the prince’s face.

“The crowd laughed louder than ever.

"The third shoe ran the sum up to thousands of pounds.

"The prince looked blue.

"The crowd shrieked with merriment.

"But the last shoe made the price of the shoes—of the doit doubled thirty-two times—far over a million of money.

"The prince looked black.

"The crowd couldn't stand the fun any longer, so they had to foot it. The prince fainted, and the people joined hands and danced round and round him till they couldn't dance any longer. Wasn't it fun?"

"And did the prince pay?" asked Lilly.

"Oh, yes! he had to pay; and the miller went home to his old 'oman, and they knocked down the mill and built a palace, and bought all the land for miles and miles around, and lived happy ever after."

"The minute hand's on seven!" cried Jeannie.

Fred jumped up, strapped his bag of books on knapsack fashion, shouldered his plaid, and went off like a bird.

He had one skate on the left foot—he could not afford two—the ice was hard on the road, and all along, the ruts left by cart-wheels were like glass, so he skated nearly the whole way, and was at school by the time the bell rang.

From what I have already stated, it will easily be gathered that Fred Hallam lived in the country.

The facts are that Fred's father was a better-class

Scotch farmer; but I do not mean to infer that he was wealthy. No. When I say "better-class" I refer to the man or gentleman himself, for indeed the farm was very small and he was very poor. He had been a Royal Navy paymaster, but his health had broken down, so he had been obliged to retire on a pittance of a pension, and the farm was taken by way of employment, and to eke out his scanty means. But if the income was not much, the outlay was but little, for Fred and Lilly were all the children, and the family lived a quiet, happy, and unambitious life. Only, his father and mother, and Lilly too, all hoped and believed that Fred would one day be something or do something, for *he* was aspiring enough, so the parents very wisely kept him at school.

It turned out that day just as Fred's mother had predicted, for although the sky had been bright and clear in the morning, by noon it had clouded gray all over; then small pellets of snow began to fall, and by two o'clock it was very dark^o inside the school-room, for flakes as big as farthings were coming down like myriads and myriads of butterflies' wings. At three o'clock the school was dismissed.

No good putting on a skate now, the snow was inches deep, so Fred put on his plaid instead, and was soon all of a glow as he rushed away homewards over the hills.

He had to pass a weird old house among trees, with lawns and shrubberies round it, but with its fences

hanging anyhow, the big iron gate off its hinges, and its turrets gray with age.

It was rented by the widow of an officer, who lived all alone with her daughter, and only kept two servants and a bull-dog.

Near this house, though hidden from its windows on this particular day, stood a tall and very handsome young gentleman. He was in plain clothes, but Fred remembered having seen him in uniform at the head of his regiment.

As soon as he saw Fred he said, "Ha! look here, boy, you are not particularly engaged, are you?"

"No, sir," replied Fred; "and if I can be of any service to you I'll be happy, sir."

"Thank you! Well, you could run a mile faster than I; don't you think so?"

"Shall we try, sir? I'm ready if you are."

The young officer smiled.

"No," he said, "I don't mean it in that way. Will you run a mile *for* me if I give you half-a-crown?"

"Half-a-crown!" exclaimed Fred. "I would run five for that."

"Well, off you go along this cross-road till you come to the Mile-end Inn, where I ordered a carriage. Say I want two horses instead of one. Return with the conveyance, but hurry them up. Come straight to the hall-door on your return if you're not afraid of the dog. Here, shall I give you the half-crown now?"

"No, sir, not till I've done my work."

Fred was out of sight in the falling snow in half a minute. He ran straight on without stopping for half a mile, when he met a one-horse carriage.

"Are you for Fern-Leigh?" he asked.

"Ay, lad, ye're richt for ance."

"And you're all wrong. Wheel round and drive back, two horses are wanted instead of one."

Fred was back with the carriage in little over half an hour.

He went straight up to the hall-door and rang the bell. The bull-dog came coughing and barking up, and smelt his legs. Fred took no notice, so the dog put him down as honest, and did not bite him.

Then the door opened, and out stepped the young officer and two ladies wrapped in furs. One was old but kindly looking. The other was pretty enough to be a fairy princess. So thought Fred.

"Bravo, boy!" said Captain Rowland, for that was the officer's name. "Bravo! Not Scotch, are you?"

"Yes, sir, every inch, though I talk English."

"Your name?"

"Fred Hallam."

"Well, here is your half-crown, Fred."

"It is too much, sir," said Fred, holding back.

"Now I know you're Scotch. But, come, I tell you that you have honestly earned it. Besides, this is Christmas eve, and that coin may bring you fortune, who can tell!"

Fred held back no longer. He took the money. He had been looking at the young lady even as he spoke to the officer.

"What are you thinking about, boy?" she said with a sweet smile.

"I'm thinking," said Fred candidly, "that you are the most beautiful lady ever I looked upon."

"How outspoken you are, boy!"

"Yes," said the captain, "but how truthful!"

"Come, babies, come," cried the elderly lady.

Fred stooped down to caress the bull-dog, and when he looked up the carriage was gliding away out into the gloom of the gathering night.

Fred started off home now, and ran every inch of the way. Running was Fred's usual form.





CHAPTER II.

THE LONG "FORENIGHTS" OF WINTER.

AS a general rule Fred Hallam was not given to excitement. He was a quiet, even-toned sort of a lad, and it took a good deal to put him out. But on this particular evening he went into the house by the kitchen-door with a rush and a bound, and it took him a few moments to recover his breath, so quickly had he run.

Standing there by the window, with the light from the open fireplace falling directly on his face, rosy with his recent exertions, anyone would have said that Fred Hallam was rather a handsome boy. Though barely fourteen, he was so tall that already he looked almost a man—so said his mother at all events. His shoulders were broad and his chest full for his years. The one closed hand that rested on the table was strong in knuckle, hard-looking, and *brown*—Fred had never worn gloves in his life—and gave promise of future strength.

I believe it would have been quite impossible for the lad to have reduced those yellow, short, and curling

locks of his to anything like subjection. Years ago his mother used to try to do so, but they were utterly rebellious. They *would* have their own way, they *would* work their own will, and that was to cluster in a mass or masses over Fred's high white brow and good-natured blue eyes. Every morning at his toilet the boy himself now essayed to effect a parting in the centre, and his sister would help him; but the yellow locks laughed at both of them, and were presently as independent as ever. Once or twice at school some of the witty boys tried to plant the name of "Towsy" on Fred, and became acquainted with the weight of his fist in consequence, after which they thought better of it.

Fred had not been two minutes in the kitchen before Lilly appeared at the inner doorway, and he began to divest himself of his plaid and his bag of books. It seemed to his sister that he could scarcely do so fast enough.

"Such luck, Lill!" he cried. "Why, our fortune's made, lass. It will be the old story of the man and the crockery all over again, only in downright earnest this time. *We* won't kick over the basket of earthenware, and *I* don't want to marry the best princess in all the land."

Lilly had come down the steps right into the kitchen now, and was standing beside her brother, gazing with open-lipped surprise up into his face. Her cheeks had turned a shade pinker, and her eyes sparkled almost as much as Fred's.

"Fred," she said, putting one hand on his shoulder, "have you found it at last?"

"Found what, Lill?"

"The great trees in the wood, where the glead-hawks build in spring."

"Oh, better than a hundred hawks, Lilly! But there, I won't keep you in tig-tire. What do you think of that?"

As he spoke he placed the half-crown piece—and it happened to be a new one—on the table before her, and with a smile on his face looked down at his sister to enjoy her amazement. Jeannie, who had just come in from milking, put down her foaming pails and rushed to the scene, standing between the two of them, with great wide eyes and hands upraised.

"Fred, dear," cried Lilly, "where *could* you have found all that money?"

"Find it, Lill! How could I find it among all the snow? No fear. I ran for it. Is it not a pretty coin? But stop now. Don't ask me another question. It is too long a story, quite a wild adventure, and I'll tell you all about it before we go to our beds to-night. Ha, ha, ha!"

Fred laughed from the very fulness of his heart.

There was an echo from behind, for another individual had come upon the scene.

"Bow, wow, wow!" barked Torlath, the bawsent-faced¹ collie.

¹ Bawsent-faced=having a blaze of white up the centre.

"Poor chiel!" said Jeannie, bending down to caress the dog's bonnie head. "He wants to ken all aboot it as weel as the rest of us."

It really seemed as though Torlath did, for dogs know so much more than we give them credit for. He stood there, with head a little on one side and ears well forward, and if ever doggie spoke surely he was speaking then.

"There is joy in your eye, young master mine," he appeared to say, "and joy in your face. Do tell us what it is all about."

Fred hurried away now to the cosy parlour to enjoy his well-earned dinner.

It was porridge made with new milk to-night, with something nice to follow, which his mother never forgot to provide for him. And what a delicious dish that same milk-porridge was! But I fear that Fred hardly appreciated his dinner enough, for all the time he kept eating he kept talking to his sister, and I fear too that he ate just a little too fast for the good of his health. But surely this was not to be wondered at, with that bran-new half-crown in his pocket and such a fund of hopefulness for the future lying at his heart.

He was laughing as well as talking, but suddenly he grew serious all at once.

"Oh, Lill!" he said.

"What is it, Fred?" anxiously asked Lilly. "You haven't lost it, have you?"

"No, I haven't lost *it*; but only look, Lill, I haven't left a scrap for the poor cat!"

Lilly grew serious now herself, for it was a custom Fred had been taught by his good and kind mother always to leave a morsel for pussy.

"And here he comes!" added the lad.

And sure enough expectant grimalkin, tail in air, came trotting into the room at that very moment. He had been out seeing the cows milked—*his* nightly custom—and now he wanted *his* dinner. He knew well enough he had only to rub himself against Fred's leg any evening, to immediately secure a good feed and plenty of caressing as well.

"I'll run," said Lilly, "and make a little brose for him. The kettle is boiling, by good luck."

And off she went; and in a very few minutes Fred's conscience was eased and pussy's appetite appeased.

A splendid red tabby he was, ten pounds weight if an ounce, with dark crimson tiger-stripes, and a face so "sonsy" and good-natured looking withal, that one would have said butter would scarcely melt in his mouth.

Yet Gilbert Bruce—called Gibbie *en famille*—was known all over the parish, not only as the best hunter but as the most daring of poachers. A perfect Nimrod of a cat. No license did he take out, no laird's permission did Gibbie require to hunt; and as to trespassing, he behaved as if there were no such law in the whole of Aberdeenshire. He would positively sit and

coolly wash his big face on the top of the fence, owned by the farmer whose wild rabbits he had just been stalking.

To the honour of Gilbert Bruce be it said, however, that he never killed a tame pigeon. He had been taught that both chickens and pigeons were private property, and, moreover, he was substantially and regularly fed at home. He hunted, therefore, as a human gentleman hunts, for pleasure and not for the pot. All the keepers—and some of them about Donside were rough enough—liked Gibbie for another reason. He used to spend an hour or so at each of their houses once a week, all the year round, and they did say that neither rat nor mouse ever put in an appearance at the houses visited by Gilbert Bruce. So, though many a gun had been raised at a huge cat seen prowling in the woods or among the furze, it had been lowered again immediately on the owner thereof discovering that the prowling cat was Gibbie. The cat, the keepers said, often met them half a dozen miles from home, and never went past one of them without a pleased recognition.

“Err-a-wa-ow!” puss would say, which being interpreted would seem to have meant, “Good morning to you! Fine weather for sport, isn’t it?”

At the farm of Kildeer the long winter evenings, or forenights, as they were called, were passed pleasantly enough. And long they were too. In the far north

of Bonnie Scotland, although during the midsummer there is generally light enough to see to read all through the night, the days are wondrous short in winter. It is Burns, our well-beloved bard, who speaks of winter as the time—

“ When biting Boreas fell and doure¹
 Sharp shivers thro’ the leafless bower,
 When Phœbus gies a short-liv’d glower,
 Far south the lift,²
 Dim-dark’ning thro’ the flaky shower,
 Or whirling drift.”

Words these to make an English boy or girl shudder a little and draw closer to the fire. And here is one other wee quotation to the same effect:

“ The wintry west extends his blast,
 And hail and rain does blaw,
 Or the stormy north sends driving forth
 The blinding sleet and snaw:
 While tumbling brown, the burn comes down,
 And roars frae bank to brae,
 And bird and beast in covert rest,
 And pass the heartless day.”

This describes exceptional weather even for Scotland, but there is no denying the shortened winter’s day.

Well, at Kildeer, what with his long walk to and from school, and his rambling in woods and wilds while returning, Fred Hallam, by the time he got home, required no more exercise. He was glad to take a book and a stool by the fire till mother had done

¹ Doure=sullen.

Lift, the sky.

work, and father returned from taking his last look at cows and horses, and locking all up for the night.

Then if father had not his weekly paper, he would take down a book and read a story, or he would tell some of his own adventures while in the glorious Royal Navy. This last was the more appreciated. But Mr. Hallam could sing as well as say. Lilly loved a song, especially the grand old songs father used to sing; they had such a true ring of the sea about them, that one might have fancied, while he listened, he heard the boom of the rushing wave, and felt the heaving motion of the good ship far away on the billows blue.

On paper nights Mr. Hallam would read and smoke in his easy-chair, sometimes aloud, if he found anything likely to be of interest to his little family, the while Lilly and Fred were bending over a game of chess.

Gael, the daft little, gray little, wire-haired Aberdeenshire terrier, always stayed in the kitchen with Jeannie, but Torlath lay on the rug before the fire, and Gilbert Bruce sat on a footstool nodding and singing to himself or to anyone who chose to listen.

They maintained a goodly custom at the farm of Kildeer, that of family worship. Soon, therefore, on this particular evening, as the old clock on the stair had cleared its throat and chimed forth the hour of nine—

“Heigho!” said Mr. Hallam, “it’s getting pretty near bedtime, isn’t it, mother?”

"It is, indeed," was the reply. "Shall I bring in the Book?"

"Yes, do."

The chess-board was speedily put away now. Lilly went and called Jeannie, who came modestly in and seated herself on the very edge of the chair next the door. Then a chapter was read, a short but impressive prayer *prayed*—not *said* only, and so ended the winter's day at this Scottish farmer's fireside.





CHAPTER III.

THE ROMANCE OF A BRIGHT HALF-CROWN. WHAT SHALL OUR BOY BE?

FRED took his candle and with a quiet "Good-night!" went up the creaking old stair to his bed-room. By and by Lill would follow. Her little room was near his, just on the other side of the clock, but she would come and see him before he retired. She nearly always did so, and to-night he knew that she would be burning to hear all about the great event and adventure of the day—the mystery of the half-crown piece.

Fred lifted his window curtain and had a peep out, then he extinguished the candle and drew the curtain quite aside. It was not a very elaborate affair, only a piece of pure white dimity that slid backwards and forwards on a string.

"What a glorious night!" the boy said to himself almost half aloud. "What is the use of a candle now?"

It was indeed a glorious night. The snow had ceased to fall, and the sky was clear and starry, only great moonlit clouds lay low on the southern horizon, like battalions of soldiers resting on their arms, expec-

tant of soon being called into action. And yonder was the big round moon, like a shield of burnished silver, while all beneath was snow. The world, or this corner of it at all events, was indeed wrapped in the pure white spotless mantle of winter. The barn-yards and outhouses had all been rethatched as if by fairy hands; on the hedges the snow lay in wreaths and swaths; the spruce-tree branches were pointing downwards with the glistening weight they had to bear, and even Torlath's kennel was rendered more artistically beautiful than ever Fred had seen it before.

Ah! but Torlath was not there. Torlath knew well how to take care of himself on a winter's night; and, hark! a soft, quiet footstep on the stair, so light that the steps scarcely even creak, and presently a wet, cold nose is thrust unceremoniously into the boy's hand as the bawsent collie appears in the moonlight.

"O, you naughty dog!" says Fred.

"I'm going to sleep here to-night, master," says Torlath almost defiantly. "Catch me go and lie in a cold kennel on a night like this!"

"Who is to guard the house, my doggie?"

"Gael is about somewhere. Besides, the tramps are sleeping in barns and hayricks, and I'm sure Tod-Lowrie¹ won't come round after the fowls in a storm like this. He can't have forgotten the shaking up that Gael and I gave him on his last visit."

"Go to bed then on the rug there."

¹ Tod-Lowrie=the fox.

Listen! another footstep on the stairs, one quite as light if not so soft as Torlath's, and a few moments afterwards, shading the candle with her hand, Lilly herself came smiling in.

"Now, Lill, come along. Put out the candle and sit here in the moonlight. It would be a sin to keep out the moon's beautiful radiance. There, I'll wrap you in this plaid from top to toe. Down you sit in that easy-chair, and I'll take the stool at your feet."

"Well, Fred?"

"Well, Lill?"

"About that half-crown?"

"Ah! I knew that was nearest your heart; girls are so full of curiosity."

"Yes, Fred; but tell me."

Then the boy told his sister all the story, enlarging it, widening it out as it were, and making altogether a very pretty little romance out of it. There was not an item of the adventure he did not mention, dwelling at some length upon the beauty of the young lady, the kindly manners of the mother, the gallant bearing of the soldier-officer, and the subdued ferocity of the bull-dog. Lill dearly loved a nice tale, and here she had one.

For fully a minute after he had finished she sat gazing thoughtfully out at the snow, the moon streaming white and clear on her serious little upturned face. Without being by any means what Dickens would have called an old old-fashioned girl, Lilly Hallam was

wise for her twelve and a half summers. Poor wee puss, she had hardly a playmate, with the exception of her brother and the dogs. She had her mother as a companion though, and had borrowed a deal of her mother's serious, thoughtful demeanour.

"Well, Lill, what have you got your considering cap on for?"

"O!" with a smile, "I'm wondering what you are going to do with it."

"Suppose it were yours. Suppose I gave it to you, what would *you* do with it?"

Lilly turned her face to the window again, as if talking to the man in the moon.

"Well, you know, Fred, father and mother are rather poor, and they want many a thing themselves, to make us happy and nice—"

"Yes; well?"

"Well, I'd give the half-crown to dear old pa. You know the bull died last week, and that was a great loss."

Fred would have laughed aloud if everything around had not been so quiet and still, and if they had not been talking in whispers.

"You dear, silly, old sister," he said, "do you know the value of a bull? Why, fifty or a hundred half-crowns wouldn't buy another."

"Well, Fred, pa likes a smoke. Buy pa a pipe."

"Or mother a mutch,"¹ added Fred, laughing. "No,

¹ Mutch, a sort of mob-cap.

no, Lilly, lassie, you're on the wrong track altogether. My idea is this, and mind you it is a glorious one, I tell you that to begin with, for fear it takes your breath away. My idea, Lill, is this, let us speculate!"

"Buy spectacles!"

"No, no, Lill, you don't seem to know the meaning of the verb 'to speculate.' I speculate, you speculate, he, she, or it speculates. They spec—"

"O, Fred, you're talking nonsense, or Greek, and it's all the same!"

"Well, Lill, I'll explain. You can't have forgotten the story I told you this morning about the man with the crockery. That fool might have made his fortune if he hadn't kicked over the basket. Let us buy—"

"Crockery, Fred?"

"No, Lill, give me time to explain. Let us buy live stock. I'm going to be a big, big farmer some day. I may as well begin now."

"But, Freddy, you can't buy cattle or sheep with half a crown." . . .

"No, not sheep; white mice, or white rats. The lambs—I mean the young mice, you know—would fetch quite a lot of money in the market. We should soon be able to double the half-crown, and buy something else with the five shillings, and double that and buy something else with the ten, and double that again, and so on. O, Lill, you've no idea how soon we shall get rich. You remember the other story I told you about the miller selling the shoes of his mule. Well,

he began much *much* lower than half a crown, and ended with millions!"

Lilly was all smiles now. But she grew serious again next minute, and once more addressed the man in the moon.

"Mamma," she said, looking very old, "told me it was sinful, very sinful, to love money, to—a—worship mammon, I think she called it. Yes, that was just what mamma said."

"O, don't be so tiresome, Lill, or else you'd better be off to bed. I'm not going to worship mammon, or anything else, I can tell you. I mean to do a lot of good with my wealth."

"Oh!" said Lill, feeling more satisfied, "what will you do?"

"I shall have to dream on that," replied the boy. "Anyhow, you and mamma shall have a fine house to live in, and fine horses to ride on, and you shall have a carriage, Lill, quite as good as Lady Kintore's, and servants in livery to attend you, and silks and satins and jewelry of all kinds—"

"O, how nice!"

"And then I mean to be so good to the poor. There won't be a single pauper in the parish where I live. And I'll be good to dogs and cats, and birds too, and perhaps build a home for them. Just wait till you see."

As he spoke he took the bright half-crown once more from his pocket, and held it out on his palm to let the

moon shimmer on its surface, then once more stowed it safely away in the little portmonnaie his mother had given him as a birthday present.

“But do you think, Fred—”

“Think what, Lill?”

“It will all come true?”

“Of course I do; why shouldn’t it?”

“Well, I don’t know. Stranger things have happened; but for poor pa’s sake I hope it will come true.”

They sat together for another half-hour in the moonlight, building such castles in the air as only children can. Then said Lill:—

“I’ll be going now, Fred. Shall we say our prayers?”

“O, my little serious sister, I can do that in bed; it’s such a cold night, you know!”

“No, Fred; what would mamma say? Besides, there is the half-crown, you know.”

“Very well,” said Fred.

Lill got up first from her knees. She waited quite a long time for her brother to rise, but as he did not she touched him on the shoulder. He swayed to the touch.

Fred was fast asleep!

Well, we must all hope that Fred will be forgiven; but it really was very naughty of the boy.

While Fred and his sister were sitting upstairs reading their own fortunes in the moon and the stars, and building all their pretty aerial castles, his fortune was

being told for him downstairs in quite a different fashion.

After Lilly had lit her candle and followed Fred upstairs, Mr. Hallam filled his pipe again. This was such an unusual thing for him to do at this time of night, that his wife looked up from her knitting at him in some surprise.

"Ahem! Put another peat or two on the fire, my dear," he said. "Jeannie's gone to bed, I suppose?"

"It is time we were all in bed, Tom," Mrs. Hallam advanced.

"Ay, ay, girl, so it is; but I have a word or two to say that I couldn't say before the children."

Mrs. Hallam replenished the fire, and it soon blazed up in quite a cheerful manner, shedding a radiance through the room that to some extent dimmed the light of the naphtha lamp.

Mr. Hallam smoked for a time in silence with his eyes turned towards the blazing peats on the low hearth.

"Ahem!" he said at last. "Isn't poor Freddy growing?"

"He is, dear boy. Why, he looks almost a man. And he is so clever! What with his Latin and his Greek and his Algebra, I'm quite proud of him."

"So am I. Well, the lad is growing up, and I'll soon be growing down, my dear."

"O, Tom! why, you're only forty-two. I'm proud of you too, dear."

She leaned over his chair, and kissed his brow and smoothed his hair as she spoke.

He caught one hand over his shoulder and held it caressingly in both his.

"Ah! Gertrude," he said, "if you could kiss the wrinkles from my brow and smooth out these gray hairs I might feel younger. It is not years, dear; it is what I've suffered. Roughing it here and roughing it there, in cold climates and hot, to say nothing of the sickness I've come through!"

There was a pause of some duration, and—a tear fell on the husband's hand.

"There, there," he said, looking up, "I've vexed you with my moping. Forgive me, and let us be more cheerful. What I was going to say is this. It is time now Fred left school. He knows enough for a farmer."

"Farmer!"

"Yes, dear, farmer. I know you want him to be a parson, or minister as they call it; but you also know how straightforward the boy is, and he told me the other day that he did not feel good enough for the Church. Now, if a boy tells you that, what are you to do or say?"

Mrs. Hallam went slowly back to her chair and sat down. It was her turn to gaze into the fire now and —think.

Her husband smoked in silence.

It was this mother's greatest ambition that her boy should be a minister—the minister of some quiet

country parish. She would not have him live in town. No, his church should be in the country. A steeple rising through the greenery of trees, low down in some bonnie glen, and seeming to point the way to happier spheres. The sweet music of the bell on quiet Sabbath mornings calling the people to worship. The crowds winding their way along the roads and through God's acre. The hush, the stillness, as her boy, solemn and begowned, ascends the pulpit. The slow impassioned tones of his voice as he speaks of heaven's love and a life beyond the tomb. This had been the dream of her life. Would it never, *could* it never come true?

And now her idol lay shattered, the bright vision had fled!

She could not think of gainsaying her husband's wishes, and her darling boy's too.

"You see," said Hallam at last, "you see, Gertrude, I am not strong, and Fred would be of the greatest service to me. He is a capital whip, and could drive the cart to the station every Friday, and take the produce by train to the market as well as I can myself. The orra man¹ could go with him just as he goes with me. What a saving that would be for my poor bones, and it would teach the boy habits of business! 'You see, dear?'"

"I see."

"I myself have been a man of business all my life; exacting yet just, I believe, to the uttermost farthing.

¹ Orra man = man of all work.

Let my boy be the same. He has it in him. He has a business eye. Well, let him study farming and stock here, and when he is old enough perhaps I may be able to help him to a better place than this farm of Kildeer. You see?"

"I see."

"He won't have much to do, mind, and he can continue to study at night. Ah! many a boy has made a man of himself—a bright and clever man, from studying all by himself in the evenings after days of toil."

"True enough, Tom."

"Well, you see, I wish to teach Fred business and self-reliance; not, mark me, for the mere sake of filthy lucre, not for the sake of money alone, but as much for the sake of the boy's own happiness and welfare in life.

"If even yet, or in a few years' time, Gertrude, he evinces any inclination to take to the ministry, it will not be too late for him to resume his studies. At present my impression is he would prefer business."

"Heaven's will be done!" said Mrs. Hallam resignedly.

"Amen!" said the husband.



CHAPTER IV.

A NIGHT ADVENTURE ON THE PACKMAN MOOR.

TWO good Scotch miles and a little over had Fred Hallam to plod to school every day in wind or storm, snow or hail, and this too all the year round with the exception of the six weeks' holiday in harvest. This holiday was known by the name of "hairst play," and no English boy ever looked forward to his Christmas vacation, with a greater amount of longing and yearning and counting of days, than did the lads of Drumdale Parish School to their short annual recess.

Fred's school life has but little to do with our story, so none of his adventures connected therewith need be recited. Suffice it to say that it was a school ruled over with a rod of iron, figuratively speaking, but in reality by a strong leathern strap cut into three fingers at one end, and denominated "the tawse."

When the teacher desired to punish a boy he said "Pandé" (hold out), and the unfortunate wretch pulled down his sleeve to save his wrist, licked his poor palm, and held it forth to meet the terrible blows. The vengeance with which they descended depended upon the

temper of the teacher at the time being. So also did the number of "pandies." And the hands tingled and burned like fire for long weary hours afterwards. It was bad enough in summer time, but in winter, when a lad's hands were probably blue already with the cold or crimson with a touch of chilblain, it was ten times worse.

Then the lads at this school were pandéd for all sorts of trifling faults. If one was late for school, "pandé." If he dared to laugh in his seat, "pandé." If his head was not constantly hanging over his work, "pandé." If he came in with a black eye, no matter how innocently received, "pandé." If he mispronounced an English word, or gave a wrong quantity in a Latin or Greek one, "pandé." So it was "pandé," "pandé," "pandé" all day long, from morning till dewy eve. Capital exercise this for the teacher's right arm, but rather rough on the lads.

Fred Hallam had been "pandéd" all through the Latin rudiments and Latin and Greek grammars; "pandéd" all through Cæsar and Livy and Cicero, and half-way through Virgil; "pandéd" straight through Xenophon's *Anabasis*, and three parts into Homer's *Iliad*. And it was just about this time that his worthy father, the ex-paymaster Royal Navy, came to the conclusion that his boy had received education enough for a farmer or man of business, and concluded to take him home.

Fred went back to school next day, however, just

the same, and for a whole month—till nearly the month of February, indeed—he heard nothing about his coming fate.

“There is no good vexing the lad,” his mother had said, “till we really want him.”

From the “farm-town” of Kildeer, which lay low down near the banks of the winding Don, to the distant school-house was a wildish bit of country. Here were hill and dale, mountain, moorland, and stream, O, a charming and romantic as well as historical country! Yet long though the road was, Fred, even in winter, oftentimes made it longer. The fact is, the lad was fond of bird-nesting, and fond indeed of natural history in its every branch. He was studying science, though he did not know it; but there was not a bird that flew nor a beetle that crawled he could not have told one something interesting about.

Meet him where you might you always found him with that big bag of books on his back, and perhaps an oaken stick clutched firmly in his hand. Yet we might say:

“He had small need of books; for many a tale
Traditionary, round the mountains hung
And many a legend peopling the dark woods
Nourished imagination in her growth,
And gave the mind that apprehensive power,
By which she is made quick to recognize
The moral properties and scope of things.”

But, it may be said, the boy would scarcely go out of his way to look for birds’ nests in the dark dead of

the body had followed. Then the otter set himself to enjoy his solitary supper.

"He has his lair somewhere here, I'm sure," thought Fred; "I'll wait and watch. But what a fine trout! How is it I can never catch fish like that? I wish I could turn myself into an otter whenever I wished."

The time flew by quickly enough. The otter had gone out of sight, but Fred waited in vain for its re-appearance. Then down went the wintry sun. Little recked the boy. He knew his way across the moor, or thought he did, and by and by the moon would rise. So there really was no hurry.

When, however, he came at length to the edge of the moor and saw in the gathering gloom that wide expanse of heather and furze, stretching out before him like a prairie, far away to the dark distant pine wood, he had half a mind to turn aside and seek once more the main road. It would be farther about, twice the distance nearly, but infinitely safer. But he thought this would be showing the white feather, and this was a feather that Fred had a very great objection to, so clutching more firmly his oaken stick, he leaped the rough stone wall and set out to cross the Packman Moor.

Highland cattle sometimes fed here; but the lad could see no signs of either cattle or sheep, or anything alive in fact, with the exception of a green plover or lapwing. The bird had been left behind by the flock perhaps. Whether or not, here it was, and it kept cir-

cling and crying round Fred's head, as if pleased to have his company.

It grew darker and darker, and before many minutes Fred could not tell with any certainty which way he ought to go, so he sat down on a stone till the moon rose. His mind misgave him, as he thought of Lilly waiting anxiously for him at home, so as soon as it was light enough he started off once more. How lonely and silent it was! The lapwing had left him now, and except for the occasional mournful hoot of a brown owl, there was not a sound to break the stillness. This did not tend to raise the lad's spirits. Moreover, this moor had a bad name. Apart from the facts attested to by every old woman in the parish, that uncanny things had been seen at night here, a ghost or two, brownies, spunkies, and other evil sprites, to say nothing of water-kelpie himself—the king of uncanny things, who lived in a deep brown pond in the centre of the moor—apart from these facts, there was an ugly story, and doubtless a true one, attached to this heath. A packman had been murdered here at the dark hour of midnight. To be sure it was a long time since. Long, long ago, in the days when packmen or pedlars were the chief bearers of news to all the country side, as well as an assortment of calico for dresses for honest goodwives and gewgaws and trinkets for their pretty daughters, a packman had stayed longer than usual at a farm-house in which he had been entertained. No reason is assigned as to the cause of this delay on the

packman's part. He may have been very tired, the fireside and the haggis may have been very tempting, and, who knows, the home-brewed ale stronger than usual. However it was past eleven o'clock on a fine moonlit night when he started to cross the moor. He was never seen alive again, but found by a herd-laddie next day stark and stiff beside his rifled pack, his sightless eyeballs turned towards the sky's blue.

And no trace of the murderer had ever been found, and this, they say, is the reason that the packman's ghost still roams on moonlit midnights up and down that dreary moor.

But Fred trudged on, thinking just a little about the murder story, but not much. Yonder, not half a mile distant, were the woods; when he reached these he could soon find the road. Yet every time the owl hooted the packman's sad story *would* rise uppermost in the lad's mind, and once when a wild duck rose with a terrible whirr and "quaick, quaick" almost at his feet his heart palpitated so that he was quite ashamed of his weakness.

Happy thought! he would sing to keep himself cheerful. So he started a song—"Auld Langsyne." Alas! it had an untimely ending. He was just at the line: "Seas between us broad hae rolled," when he became suddenly sensible of a trembling of the earth beneath him.

For the second time his heart beat uneasily. He was on quagmire! Perhaps barely three inches of soft

turf intervened between his feet and the dark deep slime beneath. As he hesitates which way to go, the horizon round him, the big white stones on the solid moor, and the furze bushes begin to sink from his view. But woe is me, it is he himself, Fred Hallam, who is sinking, and can never hope to see father, mother, or home again.

And what a death to die!





CHAPTER V.

NOW THE NIGHT ADVENTURE ENDED.

A PART from the feeling of dread, inseparable from so sudden and alarming an accident, Fred Hallam experienced one or two sensations that were rather comical than otherwise; for instance he seemed to have as many legs as an octopus or devil-fish, and each of these legs felt twenty yards long at the very least.

As if by instinct, he now uttered a yell that must have startled the moorcocks and curlews if any were about, that startled the wild ducks at all events, and was re-echoed back from the pine wood.

Then despair seized him, and the darkness and quietness of despair. Down, down, deeper and deeper he sank, slowly, so slowly; slowly but so surely. Every movement he made but increased his depth, and brought apparent death nearer and still more near. And now he is up to the arm-pits with a weight as of buckets of lead on his legs and thighs. Wildly he clutches at a rush bush growing close by, and so for a time averts his doom.

But how long can he hold this bush? His fingers

in a few minutes are cold and cramped and almost paralysed, and if he lets go sink he must, the dark and slimy mire will close over his head, he will disappear from the face of the earth and never be seen or heard of more. The very turfs that opened to let him down will close again; he knew this, for he remembered reading about travellers who had come by this same fate before.

How lonely it is! How still! How fearful to die all alone and uncared for! The very moon looks pitiless, the stars have mercy none. He cannot turn his head, he must look in one direction, only away across towards those misty moonlit hills that to-night look more like clouds than mountains. But what help can possibly come to him in so drear a region? He is far away from the footpath that leads across the moor. He had lost it early in his march.

Then he prays, and tries to resign himself to his fate. A little hope re-illumes his heart now, and once more he shouts.

“Help! help!”

The solitary lapwing comes back and goes screaming and wheeling round his head.

His eyes are getting dim now. His body is numb, and he is sinking into lethargy, when suddenly he is aroused to new life, if not to action, by the sound of a voice.

The voice is cracked and aged, but as sweet to Fred's ear at that moment is it as seraph's song.

"Hi! hi! wherever are you?"

"Pee-weep," shrieks the lapwing, "pee—ee—weep—ee—peep."

But for that bird the probability is Fred would never have been found, for when he tried to shout his tongue clave to the roof of his mouth. But the lapwing's pennons almost touched his hair as it went tacking past.

"I see you now, lad. Keep up, my boy, I'll save you sure enough."

"O, do so soon," pleaded poor Fred, finding voice at last. "I can't grasp this bush a minute longer, and if I let go I'll sink."

"Keep up your heart, boy. I can't come in 'cause then there'd be two of us, and a pretty pair of corbies we'd look. You see this pole?"

Fred did see it, and saw the somewhat bent but stalwart aged man who leant on it too, his kindly red face upturned to the moon, the moon's rays glistening in his long white hair.

"Well, I'm going to reach it out to you. Put it under your arms crossways. There! beautifully caught. Now that's your stay, lad, till I come back with old Elspet and a rope, and we'll run away with you in a brace of shakes."

The old man was off and away almost before he had done talking.

It seemed such a long long time ere he returned, but he came at last, and with him a sturdy old woman

who might have been his sister as far as age was concerned.

"Here we are," cried the old sailor, for sailor he had been; "here we are, and here's Elspet, and a sturdy old lass she is. Aren't you, Elspet? Now stand by, I'm going to throw this rope. There's a bight on it which you'll put over your shoulders. Are ye all alive and kicking?"

"Partly alive," moaned poor Fred, "but I can't kick much."

"Well, here she goes!"

Next moment the rope left the old man's hands and fell right over the lad's shoulders, and he speedily placed his arms through it.

"Now, then, Elspet, heave and she goes! hee—ow—eep! Heave again, cheerily does it, hee—ow—and—a—hup! There she rips! there she comes! hurrah!"

And, more dead than alive, Fred was extricated and dragged along to bank. He had not forgotten to bring the old man's pole with him.

He tried to stand now, but staggered and fell; but—such is young life—in a few minutes he was able not only to stand but even to walk.

The old sailor thanked Heaven for Fred's deliverance as fervidly as if he had been his own son. He took off his broad bonnet to breathe this little prayer, standing with head erect and eyes turned starwards. a very beautiful picture indeed.

And Elspet said "Amen! Now let's get the puir callant hame, Donald."

Fred did not find old Donald's home a palace when at long last he got there. Simply a one-roomed shieling in the centre of a patch of ground near to the pine wood. But the boy received a kindly welcome.

A bright fire of wood and peat burned on the hearth, and from a sway and crook depended a tea-kettle singing a duet with the cat, that sat in the cosiest corner. Elspet, a neighbour of Donald's, had come in with them, but after replenishing the fire and lowering the kettle she said "Good night!" and went off, hardly stopping to receive Fred's thanks.

"We'll bustle about now," said old Donald, "every stitch of those black muddy clothes must come off you. Why, even your bag of books is soaked."

"I think," said Fred with a feeble smile, "it was my books that saved me. The bag kept me up."

"Well, tirr, lad, tirr (undress), and I'll dress you in my Sunday clothes, give you a cup of tea, and let you toddle."

Many an anxious glance up the long "loanings" that led to Kildeer farm had Lilly taken this afternoon and evening for her truant brother. But the sun declined and set, and he came not. The moon rose round and big and red, mounted the sky, and changed to a silver shining shield, but still no signs.

To say she was uneasy would have been to say the

least. He had often been late before, but never so late as this. And all the country side was so still and quiet. The very dogs seemed cheerless and "dowie," and lay by the kitchen door as if they knew something was amiss.

Jeannie was out and in all the evening. She was grieving too, but in order not to vex Lilly, made pretence it was the dinner she was the most anxious about.

"It's nae fair o' him," she said more than once. "There's the good denner completely connached,¹ and a bonnier drap o' milk parritch I never saw. Now they're as hard and teuch as a ram's horn."

At long long last a figure is seen advancing down the loanings towards the house.

"It must be Fred," thought Lilly.

And her first impulse was to run and meet him. But no, that droll weird-looking figure cannot possibly be her handsome brother. Then a fear, born of her previous anxiety, takes possession of her heart. This must be somebody coming with news of Fred, to say he is ill at school, had an accident, or is—O dear me!—dead.

Nearer comes the figure, and so odd does he or it look now, with that strange broad bonnet, the high-necked swallow-tailed coat too big for it or him, and the queer old-fashioned knee-breeches, that Lilly is overcome by a new species of dread. This must be

¹ Connached=spoiled



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FRED RETURNS IN OLD DONALD'S SUNDAY CLOTHES.

some uncanny creature from the Packman Moor, a brownie or a spunkie, one of the wicked elves believed in so implicitly by Sandie M'Byres the bailiff, who lure belated travellers to destruction in the marshes and bogs.

She feels an inclination to rush towards it as one does who sees a ghost. "Oh—h!" she screams, then off comes the broad bonnet, and Fred's winsome laughing face is revealed in the moonlight.

"Didn't you really know me, silly Lilly?"

"O! Fred, dear, what a fright you've given me! I took you for a brownie or a spunkie!"

"So I was a brownie about an hour ago, brown enough when they hauled me out of the quagmire bog; but there was precious little spunk about me, Lilly."

"But this strange dress, Fred? O how odd you look!—I really can't help—he! he! he!" and off ran Lilly to tell her mother the story.

Jeannie was the next to come out. Small attempt did Jeannie make at hiding her feelings. No cockatoo in creation could laugh like this innocent maiden when she once fairly started. Fred stood as still as a statue, rather enjoying the fun, and Jeannie ran round him screaming and laughing, till she was fain to double up like a jack-knife. Then she unfolded, had another look, and went off again into another fit. "Laughing is infectious, and when steady sturdy Sandy M'Byres came round from the corn-yard to see what the matter was,

along with little Borlem, Jeannie's sister, and the orra man as well, the fun grew fast and furious. Poor Mrs. Hallam, quiet and lady-like though she always was, was forced to join the chorus as soon as she joined the group, and certainly such a many-keyed medley of laughing was never before heard at Kildeer farm.

Nor were the dogs out of the play. Torlath first jumped up and licked his master's ear to show that he knew him, then he made pretence to worry him, and a determined attack on those sacred swallow coat-tails, so that Fred was obliged to thrust one into each pocket of his droll old-fashioned breeches. To allay his feelings Torlath must now knock Gael over, and then go tearing in a circle round and round the garden like a tornado or a hairy hurricane.

The only creature who seemed not to have taken leave of his or her senses was Gilbert Bruce the cat. He simply stalked up to Fred, and after one preliminary sniff, rubbed his back against his leg.

"Never mind them, Master," the cat appeared to say; "no matter how you're dressed you are always the same to me."

But Fred lifted his cap now, and bidding everybody a mock-heroic "adieu!" hurried away to his room and removed old Donald's Sunday clothes.

When at last he re-entered the parlour, looking his own old self, and told the story of his terrible adventure to his mother, Lilly, and Jeannie, Mrs. Hallam thanked Heaven fervently for her boy's escape, and with tears

on her face must come round to the place where he sat, and kiss his high white brow.

And Jeannie herself could no longer restrain her feelings. Was Fred not her boy as well? Had she not known him since he was a little toddling tot, no taller than the kitchen tongs? To be sure she had. So no one wondered when she too rushed round and gave Fred a kiss and a hug.

“O!” she cried, her voice choking with emotion, “if my own dear laddie had been drooned, I would have flung mysel’ into the darkest, deepest pot in Don.”





CHAPTER VI.

“FATHER,” HE SAID, “I ~~WILL~~ COME HOME AND HELP YOU.”

MANY a winding wee streamlet finds its way into the river Don. Few, if any, of them, however, are in any hurry to get to the end of their journey and to become part and parcel of the rapid, whirling stream. The scenery is so charmingly beautiful far up Don-side that I think these “burns” like to dally with it, to stay long and enjoy it. They do sometimes take a straight course through a moss or moorland, as if the place were far too bare and gruesome to linger in. But when a stream once reaches a bit of semi-level country, then it plays all sorts of pranks—winding in and winding out, and sometimes even flowing right away back some distance as if it had forgotten something. And in the summer-time one cannot blame the stream, soothed by the soft sunshine, caressed by the balm-breathing winds, kissed by the nodding grasses, and a thousand crimson wild-flowers that dip their sweet faces in its waters. But every pleasure must have an end, and the “burnie” must flow on, hurrying

now through a heath-clad hill, perhaps babbling and singing to itself as it goes, and forming a sparkling cascade here and another there, till it dips into some dark pine-wood where primroses hide themselves in spring, where in summer the tall and stately foxgloves peep through the living green of the waving breckans. And here we find many a dark pool or "pot," that they say the kelpies¹ love, pools beloved, at all events, by the otter, whose sullen splash has caused the heart of many a superstitious and belated traveller to throb with fear. Out of the gloom of the pine-wood, as if sobered by what it has come through, the streamlet may take a straighter course, and after watering many a farm and driving many a mill, it falls resignedly into the river and is hurried away to the ocean.

But these streamlets are the abode of many a lordly trout, and the sport obtained by the angler from their banks is greater than that which can be had in the Don itself.

One Saturday morning, about a week after Fred's adventure on the Packman Moor, his father appeared at table in his well-worn suit of light-gray tweed, and the boy could guess what that meant.

"Going fishing to-day, father?"

"That am I, lad."

"And I may come?"

"Of course, my boy; I want you to."

¹ Kelpie=a kind of water-sprite, partly bat and partly man.

"Hurrah! Jeannie, get my basket and rod. It won't be fly, I suppose, father?"

"Hardly, Fred; bait. The weather, mild though it be, is rather cold yet for fly. I've told Borlem, and the young scamp is busy now in the garden digging for worms."

About an hour after this Mrs. Hallam looked up the loanings along which father and son were trudging, baskets on their backs and rods over their shoulders.

Lilly stood beside her.

"Why, Lilly," she said, "the dear boy will soon be as tall as his father."

She heaved a sigh as she spoke, and turned away to hide a tear. This good lady did not as a rule take a sad view of life, but she knew that on this very forenoon the father was going to have his first serious talk in life with Fred. She thought, too, as she noted the lad's tall, erect figure, and his youthful, swinging gait, how nice he would look walking up a pulpit stair, arrayed in the great gown that belongs almost exclusively to the Presbyterian Church of Scotland. But she must dream of this no more—and that is why she sighed.

Away went the fishermen to the Kelpie Burn, miles from any house. There was just enough wind to ruffle the surface of the water, and as the sun was shining brightly and warmly, the forenoon's sport was fair enough.

There was someone else had good sport also—a very

strange and old-world-looking individual indeed. Nobody could have called him handsome, for he was extremely long in the legs and ragged in the coat. But everyone admitted that he was exceedingly wise; and as he stood there in mid-stream, having just swallowed a fish without so much as biting it, he looked as serious as a judge in session. The individual in question was Sandie M'Byres's pet heron.

This droll bird made the drollest of pets. He would often go on a fishing expedition on his own account, and come hopping or waddling home in the evening, after having been standing half the day sound asleep in the shallow water, with one leg curled up against his chest. Jock, as he was called, preferred company, and would follow one like a dog.

About noon Mr. Hallam and his son sat down to lunch, and this finished, the former lit his pipe and for some time smoked in silence.

The heron, having finished his meal, had gone soundly to sleep as usual in mid-stream, with the blue skin over his eyes and his great bill resting on his chest.

Mr. Hallam was looking at him, but I feel sure he did not see him.

"Why, father," said Fred at last, "what are you thinking about?"

"About you, boy," was the reply. "I'm going to take you home from school to help me. You're not going to school any more."

For a few moments Fred hardly knew where he was. His bewilderment was complete.

Not go to school any more!

Not be a boy any longer!

Never again visit as a pupil that seminary which, with all its faults, he loved so well! Never hear again the school-bell tolling for him!

He had dreamt that this time would come some day, some one day, and he had pictured to himself his final departure; his bidding his companions adieu; bidding the dear old cut and hacked desks and seats adieu; bidding his teacher and the tawse adieu; but he had looked upon this day as far, far away indeed.

And now this was all so sudden! All at once he was to bid farewell to his youth, as it were—all at once to become a man. And he felt now that he hated becoming a man all at once, or becoming a man at all for that matter.

Fred Hallam was not a boy much given to crying. At school he had been known to take five-and-twenty pandies, cruelly laid on, and never show the white feather by so much as a tear. But now, do what he might, he could scarcely repress his emotion, and there was a lump in his throat that felt as large as a bantam's egg.

Mr. Hallam was quick to mark the signs of sorrow in his boy's face, and he hastened to explain the reasons why he wished him to come home, just as he had explained them to Fred's mother.

Then Fred Hallam looked into his father's face. True, he did seem getting older. He looked a bit more worn than of yore, more wrinkled, more hollow-eyed, and more weary withal.

And the boy's conscience smote him. He dubbed himself a selfish young fellow. So he braced himself up; he swallowed down that lump, and spoke up manfully, without a thrill of emotion in his clear, youthful voice.

"Father," he said, "I *will* come home and help you."

"Spoken like my son," said Hallam. "God bless you, my lad!"

Then they got up and walked home together side by side.

The old people of the parish were right. The marvellously mild weather did not continue. The wind veered round to the east, then it fell calm; the stars shone brilliantly at night, and looked so close to the earth that the hill-tops seemed to touch them. The days, too, were cloudless, and the frost was hard. Part of the Don was frozen over, and the little cataracts on the Kelpie Burn were changed to fairy falls of glass and silver.

Fred Hallam was home from school for good.

"By the by, Fred," said his father one evening as he proceeded to fill another pipe—smoking may be almost forgiven in an old sailor like Hallam.

"Yes, father," said Fred, looking up from the chess-board.

"You're fond of gardening, aren't you?"

"Oh, I dearly love it, father! and you know I've taken good pains with our own kitchen and flower garden."

"Yes, boy; but how would you like to have a garden all to yourself, to do what you chose with?"

"Oh, father!"

"And a cottage all to yourself, to do what you like with also, and turn into a study, so that you mightn't quite forget all you have been taught at school?"

Fred's face beamed like the rising sun.

He went and stood by his father and placed one arm round his neck.

"You don't really mean all this, father, do you?"

"But I do, Fred. I know your likes and your dislikes as well as you do yourself. Now, there is old Nanny Buccleish's cottage been lying vacant yonder since the poor creature's death. Nobody is likely to take it, nor do I care much to let it. You can have it, Fred, as a reward for your services on the farm."

"Father," cried Fred, "you've made me the happiest boy in—in—in—. Hurrah! Lilly, isn't it jolly? No; bother the chess! I'm not going to play another game to-night. I shouldn't be able to tell a knight from a pawn. Father, I'll go and look after my property to-morrow morning, after I've seen to the pigs and fowls."

"Very well, boy," said his father, smiling at his lad's enthusiasm.

No more was said, but the boy lay awake a long time that night, planning what all he should do with his cottage and garden.

Besides, there was still that bright half-crown, which could now be invested with probable success.

He was up next morning even earlier than usual. He felt on first awakening that there was some kind of happiness lying deep down at the bottom of his heart, though for a few minutes he could not think of what it was. But when he sat up and rubbed his eyes it all came back to him—the cottage and garden.

So out of bed he jumped with small ceremony. It was a bitter morning to take a cold sponge-bath; but Fred's father had taught him the desirability of such a daily ordeal all the year round, and probably to this alone the boy owed a good deal of the hardness of those brawny limbs of his. So in he went like a man and sponged away for fully a minute. Then there was the rubbing down, and after this he felt in such a fine frost-defying glow that he could not help singing to himself.

As soon as he had dressed and said his prayers he drew up the blind and had a peep out. When he did so a yellow flood of light from the rising sun fell full upon his face.

The panes of glass were not frozen completely over with that lovely silvern imitation of sea-weed we

sometimes notice. Only here and there were fancy grottoes and fancy flowers, as if some frost fairy had commenced a picture during the night and gone away without finishing it.

Outside it was evident enough the ground was as hard as adamant, and there was not enough wind to stir one withered leaf.

Cock-robin was close by the window-frame. It was Fred's pet robin.

The bird did not look unhappy, but just a trifle ruffled up and excited.

He glanced in at Fred with one jetty eye.

“Dear life!” he seemed to say, “here's a morning to freeze the toes off one. Will it be long before you're down to breakfast, because I'm all ready when you are?”

Of course he knew well that Fred would feed him. Yes, and cock-robin used to come and sing on the gate for his daily dole all the livelong summer; on the twenty-first of June just the same as on Christmas morning. Fred knew well enough where this particular robin, which for four years had been almost one of the family, built its nests summer after summer. Indeed, the confiding little creature took small pains to hide his home. Nor was he over particular as to its whereabouts. It might be at the foot of an apple-tree, or in a hole in the trunk of the tree itself. He was a very good parent, and used to stuff his young, with the mother's assistance, so full of the smaller kinds of

beetles, crushed or broken up, that they could not hold another beetle.

"Finest things out," he would tell Fred; "these beetles keep the young ones fat and warm. Yes, I give them garden worms as well; but there isn't much in a garden worm—watery food at best. Spiders? Only when they are ill. Then a spider or two puts them all to rights again."

I am not trying to make the reader believe that cock-robin actually spoke to Fred. I am not writing a fairy tale; but he seemed to speak, and doubtless if gifted with the power of speech these would have been the very words cock-robin would have made use of. Indeed, to the true lover of Nature, all creatures and all growing things seem to talk, and to tell him the wondrous story of their lives and their origin. 'Tis in this way flowers and trees sing the great Creator's praise, throughout all the livelong happy summer days, until they go gently asleep at the fa' o' the year.

Even in winter, midst storm and tempest, Nature is not silent out of doors, or in the woods and wilds.

Says Burns:—

"Oh! Nature a' thy shows an' forms
To feeling pensive hearts hae charms,
Whether the summer kindly warms
Wi' life an' light;
Or winter howls in gusty storms
The lang dark night."

Is this love of Nature, I wonder, born in one. I will

not pause to consider. In writing a book digression is almost a crime. Let me but say that Fred never walked abroad without meeting friends. The crimson foxgloves nodded to him as he passed, the ferns seemed to wave their fronds to him, every bush and brake had a welcome for the boy, while high up in the green beech-trees, where he used to sit and read in summer in a very cloudland of foliage, and quite out of sight of the earth, the winds and the leaves whispered to him, while bees and birds made music so sweet that more than once he dropped his book while listening to it.

Talking of books, Mr. Hallam was a great reader, and, it is almost needless to say, fond of all domestic animals and pets. There was not a manual on the management of any species of animal published, or of gardening either, that he did not get hold of.

In commencing young life as a juvenile stock-keeper, therefore, Fred had plenty of assistance.

There was no fear of Fred committing that cruel blunder so many boys, and girls too, are guilty of, namely, buying a pet, and then wondering how they shall feed and treat it.

I must not, however, be understood to mean that Fred learned to be kind to all God's creatures only from reading books. No; Nature herself appeared to draw him towards her. He was much alone in the forests and on the moors and by the river's brink, and he noted all that went on around him. Except as regards the behaviour of birds and animals that preyed

on others—and this is Nature's provision for equalizing the numbers of species—he noted how considerate even the very meanest of creatures were of the feelings of their fellows.

He had noticed ants and beetles while at work stand aside in their little pathways, to let a laden companion pass.

He had noticed one bee about to enter a foxglove bell already occupied by another, and noticed that, instead of resenting such intrusion by deadly sting, the bee inside but held up a leg to gently warn the other off.

He had seen a blackbird—his poor leg hanging half off from a heartless gunshot wound—despite the pain and agony, help to feed his young ones till they were fledged and had flown away.

He had noticed, too, while in the woods, that birds were often wondrous kind to others that were wounded—that they would bring food to those who could not stir, and even constitute themselves doctors and surgeons.

Fred was a thinking boy. Surely, he had said to himself more than once, there is something in all this, and Nature is working for some great aim.

Ah! Fred, pity after all you had not become a person. Yes, Fred, yes, there is

"A fixed degree of silent work, which wills
Evolve the dark to light, the dead to life,
Good unto better, better unto best,

By wordless edict.

A Power that builds, unbuilds, and builds again,
Ruling all things according to the rule
Of virtue—which is beauty, truth and use,
So that all things do well which serve the Power,
And ill which hinder; nay, the worm does well,
Obedient to its kind; the hawk does well
Which bears the bleeding quarry to its young;
The dew-drop and the star shine sisterly,
Globing together in the common work;
And man who lives to die, dies to live well.
So, if he guide his ways by blamelessness
And earnest will to hinder not, but help
All things, both great and small, which suffer life."





CHAPTER VII.

FRED TAKES POSSESSION OF HIS COTTAGE AND GARDEN.

FRED had that cottage of his on the brain. He had not seen it since the death of old Nanny Buckleish, but was now determined he should before two hours were over.

So he hurried downstairs.

But there was some work to be done first. The fowls were to feed, and one particular sow and young that Mr. Hallam valued very highly. The lower animals are always very hungry early in the morning, and as it does them positive injury to fast, to say nothing of the cruelty of keeping them waiting, Fred had been taught by his father to invariably feed all pets before taking his own breakfast.

Lilly was not up yet, and Fred felt a little honest pride in being downstairs first.

But Jeannie was about, and had been so quite a long time. Long, indeed, before the wintry sun had thought of showing his yellow face over the white-topped hills. She still looked a little sleepy, however. Looking

sleepy was Jeannie's usual form early in the morning. She opened her eyes a little wider on seeing Fred march into the kitchen dressed in his oldest clothes, and all ready for work.

"My conscience, Freddie!" she exclaimed, "fa would have thocht o' seein' you doon sae early. The parritch is nae on yet."

"Plenty of time, Jeannie. I'm the young farmer now, remember, and I'm going to look after my charge before I sit down to breakfast. Is piggie's food ready?"

"Ay, and the hens tee (too). Ootside the door yonder."

In ten minutes more Fred had made the big sow and her young ones as happy as a queen and thirteen princesses, and she had laid herself down on the straw for Fred's convenience in scratching her.

But off he dashed now to let out the fowls. They came out of their little door, when he drew it back, with much dashing and fluttering, the old cock first, who clapped his wings, and crew defiantly at any other cock that might possibly be within hearing, then hen after hen to the number of fifteen or twenty.

Fred flung the half-dry mash at them and among them here and there, piece by piece, so that all might have an equal share, for there were young ones among them whose breakfast would have consisted of dabs and pecks on the back from adult hens if Fred had not been careful. He kept them running and scrimmaging for the food. It was like a feathered football match

on Rugby rules. But all seemed satisfied at last, and betook themselves to the corn-yard to hunt for grubs and slugs. Then Fred entered the fowl-house to gather eggs. There were but five. Five from twenty fowls! "Something wants altering here," thought Fred. "Five eggs from twenty fowls! Ridiculous! This is under the administration of Borlem. Under mine I'll wager two to one—two turnips to a leg of mutton—that things will alter. And, dear me! how dirty and high-smelling the place is! That nesting straw hasn't been changed for months. I don't blame the hens for not laying. No respectable fowl would drop an egg in a nest like this. And the perches greasy and black, no dust-bath, mess everywhere, only a drop of dirty water in the dish, and that frozen as hard as flint. Poor, unhappy hens! But see if I cannot turn over a new leaf. I've a good mind to give Borlem a drubbing. But he's only a child, and I'm a—well, yes, a *man*, to be sure."

"Of course, Jeannie, the porridge is not ready yet. Well, as I want to go and see the old cottage, I'll have brose to-day, and I'll eat them here in the kitchen beside you."

Then Fred set about making that appetizing and flesh-forming dish—oatmeal brose. The kettle was boiling its hardest, and fluttering its lid. So he took a basin, and after holding it to the fire a minute to take off the chill, he placed therein two good handfuls of rather fine oatmeal—the *coarse* would have been no good. Then he threw over this a large tea-spoonful

of salt, and going to the fire poured enough boiling water over it to thoroughly mix and soak it. He stirred it at once as if making starch, added a little more water—just enough to float some butter—and, lo! the kingly dish was made.

With a lordly piece of nice butter placed on top, and a cup of milk to flank the basin, Fred had his breakfast, and felt not only satisfied but jolly and happy after it.

“Good-bye, Jeannie,” he cried, seizing his cap, “I can’t be always with you. Have you fed Torlath and Gael?”

“Lang lang ago,” said Jeannie.

“Good, lassie! I’ll dance at your wedding. Ta ta!”

• • •

The farm of Kildeer was neither a very large one nor a very rich one. Not over a hundred acres all told, and part of these was wood and part a hill. The house was an old-fashioned blue-slated one—almost too near the banks of the Don, some people said, for fearful are the floods that at times come roaring down the river. Behind the house were the barn-yard and outhouses, solid, substantial, and slated, but of no great height. In the rear of this again was the stack-yard. The garden stood by itself within four tall stone walls near one gable of the house, and in front of the dwelling there was simply the green sward that sloped gently down to the river. There were plenty of trees about the place, however, principally spreading ashes,

plane or sycamore trees, and tall, weird-looking Scottish pines. Just over the river the bank rose up directly from the water's edge, and was as high as a hill

“O'erhung by wild woods thickening green.”

The farm-land went up as far as the wood on one side, went straggling away with its stone fences as far as the hill on the other, and ran a long way close by the river's side. The ground was somewhat stony. It was no unusual thing for the culter of the plough to strike a stone, and cause honest Sandy M'Byres to be pitched almost sky-high. Then there were, here and there over the farm, hills that had to be cultivated, not big, but wondrous steep, and the marvel was how horses could ever get up them, or having got to the top how they could creep down again without breaking their necks.

But as Sandie would have told you, they were “sure-futtit, cannie beasties.”

What was called Nannie's cottage was situated at some little distance up the brae from the stack-yard. A long, low, white-washed, thatched cot, consisting—as the window at each side of the door testified—of only a “butt and a ben” (two rooms). There was a garden, or what had been a garden, in front of the door. Yet, humble though it was, it commanded a charming view of the river, the woods and hills beyond, and miles upon miles of the most lovely scenery the eye could wish to dwell upon.

Towards this cottage Fred was directing his footsteps when he met Sandie M'Byres, the droll, old-fashioned "grieve" (bailiff). Sandie was blowing on his fingers, but gave Fred kindly good-morning.

"Man," he said, "isn't it cauld the day?"

"It is indeed, Sandie. Have you been up long?"

"Up sin' half-past fower, man," replied Sandie, "and pamberin' aboot wi' a lantern. The meen (moon), the auld jaud, gaes till her bed when she's maist wantit."

Half-past four, indeed! Well, that put Fred's early rising considerably in the shade.

"And," added the grieve, "I've been slicin' neeps (turnips), and I can tell ye that's no warm work. Arena ye cauld yoursel'?"

"Only my point ends, Sandie."

"Point ends! Loshie, man, fat's that?"

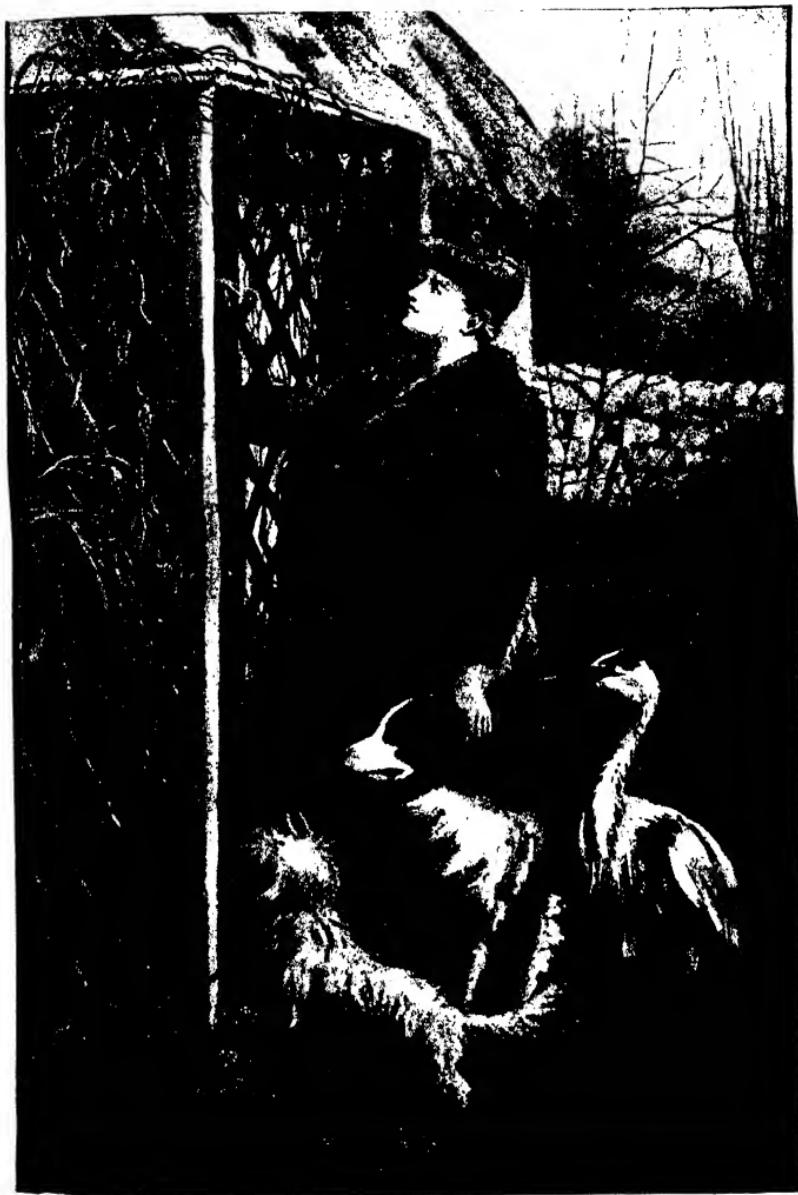
"Why, the tops of my ears and point of my nose, the ends of my fingers and tips of my toes."

"Man, you're clever. You're a poet. If ye keep on like that ye'll beat Robbie Burns himsel'."

"Well, Sandie, I'm going to be overseer now. I'm never going back to school any more. I'm going to be head-gardener, too, and father's given me that little cottage to do what I like with, and won't we have fine fun; and you must come and see me when it is furnished, and smoke your cutty, and tell Lilly and me stories."

"It'll be perfectly gran'," said Sandie.

Off went Fred now, the two dogs and Sandie's heron



following close at his heels, the former having evidently come to the conclusion that something more than usual was in the wind to bring their master out of bed, so early.

The cottage did not look inviting either outside or in. Fred touched the latch and pushed the door open. It creaked with the frost as he did so.

A cold, damp air pervaded the place, which would have struck a chill to the very bones of one less sturdy than young Fred Hallam. He looked at matters with a healthful happy eye, however.

"Never mind, Torlath," he said, smoothing the collie, "just wait till summer comes and see the reformation I'll make here."

Fred closed the door again as he spoke, and went to have a look at his garden. It was all in front of the house, and had a very gentle slope towards the river.

There would be plenty of sunshine here at all events, and that would be one very great advantage. It was fenced round and round by the ordinary style of loose stone wall, with here and there, growing almost up through the walls, or "dykes," as they are termed in this country, a mountain-ash or rowan-tree, and here and there a boor-tree bush or elder. The gate in the centre was of no great width, but by the side of it grew the only thing of beauty about the whole place — a laburnum tree. Fred remembered what a lovely ornament this tree used to be in spring in Nanny's day, laden with its bunches of golden drooping blossom.

“ You shall remain,” he told the tree; “ and you too, ye bonnie, bonnie rowan-trees; but as for you, master boor-tree bushes, with your roots that spread right and left o'er all the garden—you must go.”

There must have been a deep well of music and feeling in Fred's heart, for as he looked at those mountain-ashes, and thought of the white flowers they bore, and of the rich red berries that adorned them in winter, he commenced humming over that enchanting old Scottish song: “ The Rowan-tree.”

“ Oh ! Rowan-tree ! Oh ! Rowan-tree !
 Thou'l aye be dear to me,
 Intwined thou art wi' mony ties
 O' hame and infancy !
 Thy leaves were aye the first o' spring,
 Thy flow'rs the simmer's pride,
 There was nae sic a bonny tree
 In a' the countrie side,
 Oh ! Rowan-tree !

“ How fair wert thou in simmer time,
 Wi' a' thy clusters white,
 How rich and gay thy autumn dress,
 Wi' berries red and bright.
 On thy fair stem were mony names,
 Which now nae mair I see,
 But they're engraven on my heart,
 Forgot they ne'er can be;
 Oh ! Rowan-tree !”

I'm not quite sure, however, that Fred always knew when he was singing, or what he was singing.

At present while he sang he was walking about looking at poor, dear Nanny's garden. Everything

was very much as the old woman had left it, only the frost had been playing queer pranks with some leaves still left unwithered. And how the frost can beautify all things! The leaves, for instance, of the strawberry plants, of the low holly bushes and small tree boxes, were fringed all round with spikelets of silver; the old-fashioned rose-bushes, though leafless now and bare, had been transformed into branches of snow-white coral. One could hardly wonder at King Winter taking pains to beautify these; but he had taken pains to decorate even the cabbages and the old lady's leeks, while every blade of Scotch kail had been changed into an ostrich feather.

There was a rustic porch in front of the door, over which in summer the red-gold honeysuckle used to fling its glamour. Fred leaned against it just for a moment, as he thought how fond his father's tenant used to be of her old-fashioned flowers, of her carnations and pinks, her crimson and yellow wall-flowers, her glorious sweet-williams, her sheets of daisies, red and white, her campanulas that the bees so loved, and of that great bush-fuchsia that still grew beneath her parlour window.

He remembered the old woman herself too; how she used to sit in the sun all the forenoon, knit, knit, knitting always, to keep her from the poorhouse. And what a blameless life she had led, never going abroad farther than his father's farm, except to the church every Sunday, clasping to her breast the Bible,

rolled in a clean white handkerchief, and the invariable morsel of sweet-scented southern-wood to sniff in church, as she sat on the pulpit stairs, that she might catch every word that fell from the lips of the "man of God."

Her Bible was her only comfort, with the minor exceptions of her cats and her cup of tea. Ah, yes, those cats! That was an affecting reminiscence to tender-hearted Fred. For old Nanny had been exceedingly kind to her three tortoise-shell-and-white pussies. And she was everything in the world to them.

When Nannie died, or "wore awa'," as we Scotch express it, the cats were inconsolable. Quiet in their grief, however. There was some mystery about this death they could not fathom nor understand.

And when the men came to take away the body, they found the three poor cats sitting mournfully on the coffin lid. No wonder one of the bearers turned aside to hide a tear.

We probably owe that beautiful picture called "The Shepherd's Chief Mourner," to the imagination of the great artist, but this that I relate is a fact.



CHAPTER VIII.

HOW THE COTTAGE WAS FURNISHED.

WISER and older heads might possibly have made more of the garden and cottage than Fred did, but hardly, I think, could anyone have set about the work with greater energy and willingness.

To his credit be it said, the boy was fond of his books. He loved his Euclid, because the problems seemed to him like a succession of the most beautiful puzzles, all the parts of which fitted in with the greatest exactness, and he delighted in having those puzzles solved. He loved his classics too, especially Virgil and Horace, because they talked or sang of country life, and Homer, because it somehow reminded him of the high-sounding and splendid metaphor of the poet Ossian.

Well, he determined to keep those classics up. But the farmhouse of Kildeer was no place in which to study. His own bed-room was just a trifle "poky," and Fred loved the fresh air and plenty of it. Downstairs the rooms were big enough and airy enough, but then there were distracting noises. If he tried to

study in the drawing-room, someone was sure to come to visit his father and he was turned out. If he chose the dining-room in which to read, there was Jeannie not far away, not only knocking pots and pans about and rattling plates, but singing to herself, ~~for~~ Jeannie could no more help singing than the larks could.

But that cottage when it was all furnished and nice, ah! that indeed.

So he lost no time in commencing operations.

The boy's father was as kindly-hearted an old sailor as ever stepped on shore on half-pay. He had given the lad this cottage and garden, and he did not mean to spoil the ship for "a happorth of tar." He had confidence in Fred. He knew he would work all the harder if encouraged. So he told him he might have nails, and paint, and wood, and everything else in reason.

We shall see later on whether this confidence was misplaced or not.

Now Sandie M'Byres and Fred were very particular friends. Sandie loved Fred, in fact, and this not because the boy spent many a penny in buying him "pickles" of snuff. But they were much together in the winter forenights. For a capital tongue for telling a story wagged in Sandie's mouth—especially ghost stories, and stories about spunkies, brownies, fairies, elves, and water-kelpies, in all of which Sandie believed as implicitly as in the history of Sir William Wallace which lay in the corner window-sill of the bothy in

which he lived, side by side with Burns's poems, the Shorter Catechism, and the Bible.

Would Sandie help him in his idle hours to do the rough work about the cottage and garden?

"Yes," said Sandie, "like a shot I will, man."

Nannie's floor had been an earthen one. This would not suit Fred, so he and his friend, with pick-axes, barrow, and shovels, cleared it all out from both rooms to the depth of nine inches. And beautiful garden top-dressing the stuff made.

The next business was to lay a floor of rubbly concrete, and this was a more difficult and tedious job. Strong though he was, many a time and oft did Fred's young back ache with those heavy barrow-loads of old broken bricks, or pebbles from the Don.

But even this work was finished at last, and then came the manufacture of a mixture of sand and lime with a portion of cement, that, being spread over, would harden into a flooring as firm as flint.

This Fred did all himself, in both rooms, and right to the doorway also. He did it bit by bit, smoothing the work with a wet trowel as he went on, as gingerly as if he had been spreading butter on bread.

When the work was finished and dry Fred was more than pleased, he was proud and delighted, and must needs bring his mother and Lilly up to see it.

"The rooms are somewhat small, aren't they, Freddy?" said Mrs. Hallam.

"Ah! true enough they are small, mother, but they

will be all the more cosy; and look, each window opens as a casement on hinges, and I can always have them open in summer."

"True, Freddy."

"And when we have a few roses twining and trailing round the windows, oh, mother, won't it be romantic and jolly!"

His mother smiled at her son's enthusiasm.

"I'm going to make this room my study and Lilly's boudoir," he continued, "and the other room—'butt the house,' as old Nanny called it—will be the workshop and bird-room, for I mean to keep birds and make all sorts of queer things."

"Well, I hope you'll do well, boy."

"Oh, mother, I know what you're thinking about; but I won't neglect the work father gives me to do out of doors. And mind you, mother, I mean to have a different lot of fowls about Kildeer by another spring, for if there be any truth in books, there is a bit of money to be made out of fowls if you go the right way to work."

"You mustn't be mercenary, Fred," said his mother, placing a hand kindly on his curly head.

"Mercenary?" repeated Fred, with a far-away look in his eyes. "Mercenary—from the Latin *mercenarius*, meaning 'easy to be hired,' 'greedy of gain.' No, mother, not quite that, but making money really is fine fun, and so much good can be done with money, and I really mean to have enough money to buy you a

nice pony-carriage to ride in when you're quite an old lady, mother."

And so the boy laughingly rattled on. For hope beats high in the heart of youth.

The whitewashing of walls and ceiling was the next thing to be done, and a pretty fright Fred himself was before the work was finished. Luckily he wore nothing that would spoil; but his hair was spotted, his boots and his face were spotted, in fact, as Sandie said, "he was spotted and speckled like one of Jacob's cattle."

He had got the ordinary whiting of the village shops and mixed it pretty thick, adding a good lump of melted size to each bucket, and he had borrowed Jeannie's blue-bag to give the mixture an artistic tint withal.

To have papered the walls would have run to money and would not have been at all in accordance with the general tone of the establishment, as Fred grandly termed it.

While the boy was busy indoors his trusty friend Sandie spent an hour or two, morning and evening, in doing up the roof and exterior. It was agreed between the two that a whitewashed cottage is an abomination. The front was therefore roughened and "harrled." The harrle is a mixture of very rough sand and lime-clay, and it is dashed on the walls instead of being plastered on, being left, therefore, even enough, but with a roughened surface. I am sorry I do not know the English term to describe the process. But it looked very pretty.

when finished. Fred could not have done this himself, nor could he have rethatched the roof with heather as beautifully as handy Sandie did. But the boy himself had pulled the heather from the hill, made it up in bundles, and carted it home. And that was no easy work in cold weather.

The dogs during the progress of the work were much exercised in their minds as to what it could all mean, and the "craigit heron," as Sandie called his pet, was seldom out of the garden, but as he did little else except stand on one leg on the top of the stone fence and go soundly asleep, it could not be said that he was much interested in the renovation of the cottage.

Torlath was wide-awake enough, and little Gael had mice on the brain, and dug holes in the garden deep enough to bury himself. Sometimes, indeed, there was no part of him visible but his stumpy little tail.

Gael was a wonder at all times. No coat that dog ever wore was harder or rougher than the jacket of gray which covered Gael from nose to tail-tip. No dog ever had keener eyes or sharper teeth or more saucily-pricked ears than this dare-all little terrier, and although very quiet and gentle at home, he never could meet a dog on the road or in the village street without challenging him to fight. The consequence was that Gael was never free from ugly scars. But this was not all, for Torlath, though peaceably inclined, had often to fight Gael's battles for him.

A curious example of this little rascal's pugnacity

occurred on the very day on which the cottage was finished, and Fred about to turn his attention to the garden.

Captain Rowland had often seen and talked to the boy since the evening he had presented him with that new half-crown. He had taken quite a fancy to the lad, and, missing him when he had left school, had called round to-day to inquire after him, and to invite both Lilly and him to tea at the Hall, where he lived.

He was accompanied by a huge mastiff.

Now mastiffs rank among the most sagacious dogs we possess. Nor do they ever provoke a quarrel; they are far too noble to do that; but if set upon by another dog they are bound to protect themselves. *Noblesse oblige.*

So when Gael ran up and confronted Emperor, and demanded the reason of his presence on his—Gael's—grounds, the lordly fellow hardly knew what to reply.

“Defend yourself, then,” cried little Gael, “I'm going to shake you as I would a rat.”

Emperor could not help smiling to himself at the pretensions of this canine Jack-the-Giant-Killer; but when Gael flew straight at his throat, and hung on there as a weasel would have done, Emperor thought the joke had been carried far enough. So he lost his temper, and first and foremost he fell upon Gael, almost crushing the life out of him, then he picked him up, gave him two shakes, and threw him down on the

bank. And there lay poor Gael stark and stiff, yet weltering in his gore.

Captain Rowland was greatly annoyed, and would have punished Emperor severely, had not Fred pleaded for the honest fellow, for it really was no fault of his.

"Well, now," said the captain, "you must come to dinner instead of tea, and I'll do my best to get you just such another little dog to replace poor Gael."

Replace poor Gael indeed! What other new dog can fill the place in our affections a dear favourite has left void! Gael was covered up with an old sack, and great was the grief of Lilly and Fred.

In the quiet of the evening Sandle and Fred went to dig poor Gael's grave. But before doing so the boy lifted the sack to have just one peep at his dead favourite. To his joy and astonishment Gael's eyes were open and bright, and he wagged his stumpy tail. It was the story of Mother Hubbard all over again! Instead of being buried, therefore, Gael was taken to the kitchen and carefully nursed before the fire by Lilly and Jeannie. In a fortnight's time he was running about as saucily as ever, evidently convinced in his own mind that he had slain that mastiff.

Fred's cottage was finished indoors and out at a very trifling expense indeed; industry had turned it into one of the cosiest-looking little dwellings it is possible to imagine. To be sure, it was as yet unfurnished; and now came the question what to put in it. Had Fred or his father either been rich it would have been easy

enough to have sent for some clever upholsterer from the city of Aberdeen, and given him a general order. But this would have taken away all the romance of the business. No, Fred must do the best he could without that city upholsterer. The furniture, too, must be in keeping with the style of the cottage. It must be old-fashioned. Luckily there was plenty of ancient furniture about the farmhouse of Kildeer, and Fred had only to choose.

Some of it that there was no room for in the house had been stowed away in a stable-loft, and thither Fred and Sandie bent their footsteps to begin with.

"A table and chair is all that I'd care for," said the boy, "and a shelf or two for my books; if it wasn't for Lilly."

"Ah! man, aye," said Sandie. "Lilly's a little lady. She maun hae a sofa."

"Well, there is the very thing," cried Fred, pointing to an old oaken dais, "complete and artistic." So that was taken into the cottage and placed against the wall opposite the window. A high-backed chair was found next, and several other lighter ones to match, also a table and, lucky find for Lilly, a footstool.

It is true that Fred really had thoughts of making the furniture himself, every bit of it. He was a daringly ambitious boy, and might have managed too, for one really never knows what one can do till one tries. But then spring was advancing, the blackbirds and mavises were already looking out for quiet spots in which to

build, the larks were singing high in air, and it would soon be seed-time, when to some extent the services of Sandie would be curtailed. With their own hands, however, the two friends did manage to knock up a work-bench beneath the window of the other room, and to place handy shelves, broad and wide enough for bird-cages, on different parts of the wall.

So things were becoming rapidly shipshape. The fireplace in the best room was simply the low hearth, but when a wide rustic fender was put round it, and a fire of peats or logs lit, it looked far more artistic than any grate could have done. The fire was kept up for some days to thoroughly dry the house. Book-shelves were easily made, and then Fred removed all his books to the cottage, as well as a huge old-fashioned oil-lamp and a few common articles of crockery ware for his corner cupboard.

That same evening Lilly came up, and with a roaring fire of fine dry peats and fir logs burning on the hearth, the lamp lit, his sister in the high-backed chair, pussy on the footstool, and Torlath on a mat near by, Fred thought his whole arrangements quite complete and wholly delightful.

Lilly damped his ardour just a little by saying that the window without a blind looked somewhat naked. Fred had not thought of that, but made a mental note of it.

“And now, Lilly,” he said, “we—that is, Sandie and I—will have a week’s work at the garden. But in the

meantime I'm all ready for my first cargo of live stock.
We have not broken that half-crown yet, you know."

"And it's going to be white mice and rats, Fred?"

"Yes, Lill; I'm told they are delightful pets, and
that there is no end of money to be made by them."

Then these two children discussed the *pros* and *cons*
of the coming speculation, and I greatly fear they
rather exaggerated the profit side of the account, and
forgot the other almost entirely.





CHAPTER IX.

LAYING OUT THE GARDEN—AN INVITATION TO THE HALL—GAEL AND EMPEROR AGAIN.

THERE was little room for fancy gardening in the bit of ground that old Nanny had called her “kail-yard.” But even in a small place like this it is truly wonderful what taste will accomplish. Simplicity had to be studied, and even made an art of. So the first thing that Fred did was to make a simple plan of his garden on paper, as a guide to himself and Sandie M’Byres.

He had thought of laying down the largest part in vegetables, for it must be confessed that pretty rows of peas, onions, beet, and carrots look charming peeping up through the brown earth in early spring. They do not look quite so nice, however, a little later on when the battle with the weeds begins, for their beauty must be sacrificed for the sake of utility. So Fred gave up that idea. His father’s big garden was capable of growing all the vegetables required on the farm of Kildeer.

But grass would look pretty,—grass with a circular

flower-bed in the centre of each plot, and flower borders all round.

Then there could be gravelled walks, and a larger sweep of gravel right in front of the windows and house, with a rockery at each corner.

When he had finished it Fred looked at his plan over and over again, and then showed it to his mother and Lill. They seemed more than satisfied, so off he went to Sandie's bothy.

It was long past eight o'clock, and Sandie was sitting by his low fire with his boots off reading a chapter in the Good Book previous to retiring. In a corner of the bothy, on one leg and asleep as usual, was that wonderful "craigit heron." The bird opened one eye as Fred came in with a rush. He would not have taken the trouble to open both eyes even if the queen had come in.

Sandie M'Byres glanced at Fred's garden plan, and his face appeared to broaden and brighten as he did so.

There were tears in the honest fellow's eyes as he handed it back to Fred.

"It is simple, isn't it?" said the latter.

"Simple, man, that's the beauty o't. I think I see that gairden already fan it's a' in bloom, the yellow graivel on the walks, the floweries a' bloomin' red and blue and fite (white), the roses trailin' roon' the porch, and the o-broom-saugh (laburnum) hangin' like a shower o' gowd (gold) athwart the gate. Freddy, my

bairn, you're going to be a farmer. But, ech, man, you've spoiled a richt good parson. I'm like your mither, laddie, I'd raither see ye wagging your head in a poopit (pulpit) and expoundin' the Holy Book I haud in my han' here, than see ye the richest fairmer on this side o' Don."

Fred smiled, coloured a little, but made no reply; only many a time in after years did he think of those words of honest enthusiastic Sandie's.

The boy's simple garden plan having met with approbation on all sides—he had even shown it to Jeannie—it but remained for him to commence operations in earnest. Fred's father was not the man to overwork his young son, and the duties that devolved on him about the farm were not only comparatively light, but they left him a good many hours of each day to himself. Sandie had to work hard enough, but then Sandie was thirty, and had shoulders as broad as those of a drayman, although none of the beer-begotten and useless fat that draymen so often carry.

The first thing to be done was to dig and level the whole of the garden, and Sandie did most of this work. The walks had then to be laid out according to the plan. For this, of course, they needed the aid of a garden line and a two-foot rule, for exactness in such a matter is of the utmost moment. The former was very easily constructed, simply a long piece of twine rolled round two short pointed sticks. The two-foot rule Sandy possessed. Two pieces of cane, correspond-

ing exactly in length to the width the walks were to be, were next made, and then the two friends set to work and very shortly pegged off the paths, neither the centre walk nor those that led crossways near the gate being made too wide, else the symmetry and beauty of the garden would have been spoiled. The walks were now trampled down, little Borlem assisting in this work; although he was indeed a midget he was a willing one. The semicircular space in front of the cottage, which it was intended to lay down in gravel, was also beaten down under foot. The object of this trampling was twofold: first, it enabled the workers to see whether the paths had been properly measured and in proportion, and secondly it rendered digging more easy. For as soon as the paths were formed and beaten down, about nine inches of mould all along them had to be taken out to make room for rubbish and shingle, and subsequently gravel. The gravel, of course, would not be put down until the whole garden was cropped, else it would get soiled.

It took Fred a whole day to get ready the paths for the rubble, for after the digging they had to be raked even and level.

It took him the greater part of three days to lay down the bottom and arrange it neatly, beating it with the end of a heavy round piece of wood. But when this bottom was all down, the garden already began to assume shape.

What should he put in for a border at each side of
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the walk? This was a question that exercised him not a little, and finally he consulted Sandie on the

"Bricks, man, bricks," said that worthy, "there's mair than twa cairt-load o' them lying at the back o' the shed. They'll never be used. The last fairmer had meant to big (build) a mill stalk wi' them, but he's dead and gane. I'm sure your fauder (father) winna mind your havin' them.

"Ye see," added Sandie, "girss (grass) would make a bonnie border, but it's ill to keep tidy, man. Box-wood would be tidier and better, but box-wood costs bawbees. And so do tiles. Bricks, man, bricks, it maun be bricks."

Fred asked his father. "Certainly he could have all the bricks he cared for."

So Fred raked his borders and carefully placed down his bricks as edging.

The actual flower borders were now measured off and pegged off, and these were left two feet and a few inches wide.

And now came one of the most difficult of all the gardening operations, the cutting of the turf, and the laying of it down, and once again Sandie's services had to be requisitioned.

Most carefully and levelly had the ground to be raked to commence with, trodden down somewhat, and levelly raked again. Turf, delightfully green and short, with a little white clover in it, was easily found at the

roadside. It was divided by the spade into strips the breadth of that implement and about two feet long, rolled up with the grassy side inwards, and each roll carefully lifted into the barrow. Thus gingerly treated, it was really surprising to Fred how easily it unrolled and took up its position where it was intended it should lie.

As the lad saw a lovely green lawn as level as a billiard table growing and growing in extent in front of Sandie, he could not help exclaiming:

“ Well, Sandie, you talk about my being clever. I could no more do that than fly. And I’ve been at school all my life too. Sandie, man, it is you who are the genius.”

Sandie laughed, and stood up to get the “ crick ” out of his back as he phrased it, and to indulge in a very large pinch of snuff.

Perhaps the most ticklish part of the turf-laying was getting round those flower-beds. But they were first measured off with a radius of twine from a centre peg, and when all the grass was laid they were cut perfectly circular with a large knife.

An extra barrowful or two of earth had been left here, so that when the beds were nicely raked they were higher in the centre.

It was about this time that Captain Rowland—fishing-rod on shoulder—called round again. He did not bring the mastiff with him, however. He called, he said, just to remind Fred of his promise to come

and dine at the Hall next evening. It would be a moonlight night, so they would have no difficulty in finding their way home.

The first individual he met was Gael.

"What!" cried Captain Rowland in unfeigned surprise, "is this another dog of the same breed, or is it the same one risen from the dead?"

"It is Gael himself, sir," replied Fred, laughing. "We were just going to bury him, when he opened his eyes and wagged his tail."

Gael looked up at the captain in that insolent independent manner, that only a real Aberdeenshire terrier can assume.

"Where did you bury that big brute of a mastiff that I slew?" he appeared to ask.

The captain bent down to smooth him. Gael showed his white teeth, and Captain Rowland thought better of it.

"Ah! you're gardening, I see. What an improvement! And that cottage is to be your study? How interesting! Have you many flowers?"

"Not over many, sir," said Fred; "but there are a number of old-fashioned things in the big garden that will do with division."

"Ah! now you want a beautiful standard, or rather half-standard, rose in the centre of each flower-bed, and a few round the sweep of flower border in front of the cottage."

"Too late, isn't it, sir; November is—"

"Ah! yes, yes, November of course is the best month for transplanting nearly all kinds of bushes, but brier-grafted roses are kindly inconsiderate things. I'll send some with a large ball of earth round each, and you must put them in as soon as you get them. Well, I'm off, dinna forget; so glad the doggie didn't die; good-day!"

And away marched the sturdy young captain of Highlanders.

Sure enough that very evening, before sundown, a cart came down the loanings and stopped by the old cottage gate, and from it the man in charge not only unloaded carefully over two dozen half-standards, but quite an aggregation of old-fashioned flowers. Here were primroses and polyanthuses actually coming into bloom, daisies that Fred could tell by the leaves were red and white, ranunculus, scillas, jonquils, pansies, violas, forget-me-nots (a very large number), and silenes—a charming compact flower that would hug the earth and bloom crimson in early May—besides many others that I have no space to name.

"Tell your master," said Fred, "that I am overwhelmed with gratitude."

Fred's language was sometimes a little far-fetched for a lad of his years.

"I'll tell him, sir," replied the servant, "that you're muckle obligeed till him, if that'll do. But loshie, laddie, we dinna miss a few flowers fae our big gairden."

"Well, I'm thankful all the same."

Fred went off now at once and got Sandie to come and assist him to get the flowers in, lest the frost should kill them, and together they laboured away till they had planted everything. The forget-me-nots went right round all the borders near to the edging of bricks, and behind these were placed the silenes.

The stars were out before flower-planting was finished, and so genuinely, but delightfully, tired was Fred that he fell sound asleep that evening in his chair soon after supper.

To-morrow was to be a red-letter day in Lilly's diary. Although she was a retired officer's daughter, the family were certainly not in very flourishing circumstances, for so short had Mr. Hallam's period of service been that his half-pay was a mere pittance. So Lilly, and her mother too, considered it a very great honour that she should be asked to dine at the Hall.

Captain Rowland was considered one of the richest young lairds about the place. It was not more than a few years since he had come into possession of *The Hall* on the death of an uncle. His coming marriage with beautiful Miss Venner caused no small sensation in the country side, and it was currently reported that after the wedding and honeymoon he would retire from the army and devote his life to his tenantry and the improvement of his estate.

After attending to the duties incumbent on him about the farm, Fred was back again next morning working



LILLY INTERRUPTS FRED IN HIS GARDENING.

away in his garden, entirely oblivious of the fact that he was going out to dine that evening at a great house.

It was towards four o'clock in the afternoon, and he was standing with a Dutch hoe in his hand, critically scanning the corner where the summer-house was going to be built, when he heard the sound of light footsteps behind him on the shingly path, and looking round, lo! there stood Lilly. Most appropriately was she named Lilly. She looked indeed more beautiful than any lily just then. There was nothing gay or gaudy about her dress, everything she wore was neat and simple, yet everything became her. Her long hair was combed off the brow, fastened with a ribbon of blue, and floated straight over her shoulders and back, a perfect cataract of golden brown.

"Oh, dear me, Fred!" she cried excitedly, "*are you wise enough?*"

Fred leant both hands on his hoe now, doing an attitude, as it were, and gazed at her wonderingly.

"I've never heard much complaint made," he replied, "on the score of my intelligence."

"Don't be stupid, Fred. *Do you know what time it is?*"

"I can soon tell you." As he spoke he pulled out a huge old turnip of a watch.

"We'll be late," said Lilly, "certainly late, for Captain Rowland's dinner party."

"Oh, Lilly, I really had forgotten! I'm serious now. But I'll soon throw on my things."

"Do I look nice, Fred?"

"Y—e—s. Indeed, you are almost pretty, Lill."

Half an hour later—for it never took Fred long to dress—they were trudging along the road together in the gathering gloom of night, and before they reached the Hall there was a star or two out in the east and more appearing every minute.

They marched straight up the avenue to the Hall door. Emperor came bounding round to see who rang, but made quiet love to them the moment he scented who it was.

Fred looked very handsome and manly in his evening dress. He might have passed for some youthful prince. The best of it was that he was coolness personified, so that, although he had seldom dined in so great a house, he really seemed to the manner born.

Deep down at the bottom of his heart, however, was a little uneasiness lest he might make some blunder in speech or action, and say or do something contrary to the usages of polite society. It was this feeling that caused the extra flush on his cheeks, the brighter sparkle in his eyes. These eyes he kept open too, and his ears as well. He took time to speak and act, and did not allow himself to be carried away by excitement of any kind.

The consequence was that at table Fred was a complete success.

There were very few present, however, only the captain's mother and sister, a clergyman from Aberdeen, and Mrs. and Miss Venner of Fern-Leigh.

Fred had the honour of taking Miss Venner in to dinner. He was very nearly making a mistake here and giving the wrong arm, but took his cue from Captain Rowland just in time.

Captain Rowland took Lilly in, and a very dainty wee lady she looked, though not quite so self-possessed as her brother.

Fred was in luck to be seated beside so intelligent and suggestive a conversationalist as Miss Venner, because she drew him out, as it is called; made the best of him, and got him to talk on subjects he quite understood and thoroughly loved.

Natural history, in its simplest form, was probably Fred's strong point. Miss Venner loved Nature too, but still she did not know quite so much as this boy, because she had not lived in the woods and wilds as he had done.

How quickly that evening passed to be sure! It was all like a dream to poor unsophisticated Lilly and Fred, especially the music.

“O,” Fred thought to himself, “if I could play the violin as Captain Rowland does I would give—I would give—I’m not sure I wouldn’t give my new bright half-crown.”

But every time has an end, and before Fred could have believed it, two hours had gone and it was time for coats and cloaks.

The verdict of the company was that Fred and Lilly were “such dear children,” and that “they must come again.”

Fred did not forget to thank Captain Rowland for his splendid gift of flowers, and before he left Miss Venner made him promise to take them to the hills one day when the bright weather came, and show them where the wild birds built and the sweetest wild flowers grew.

Captain Rowland lit a huge cigar and intimated his intention of seeing the little visitors half-way home—through the dark woods at least.

With them came Emperor.

It was indeed a lovely night. The moon shone so brightly one could have seen the figures on the smallest watch or seen to read the finest ordinary type.

The road appeared very short, for the captain was telling his guests some of his tiger-shooting experiences in India, and both were interested, not to say thrilled, by the relation.

They were just through the wood, and out from under the chequered shadows of those weird-looking pine-trees. Emperor was advanced guard, trotting quietly on a little way ahead, when suddenly something small and dark was observed coming feathering along the road to meet them.

Fred's heart, and Lilly's too, palpitated uneasily, for a moment afterwards they could see it was the wee spitfire Gael. He had missed his master and mistress from home, and simply came to look for them.

“What shall we do?” cried Lilly.

“Don't alarm yourself, my dear” said Captain Row-

land quietly and kindly. "Let us stand perfectly still and not talk. It is the talking of the dogs' owners that in nine cases out of ten leads the animals to fight.

Gael walked straight up to confront Emperor.

Here was Scotland and England face to face in stern reality—England in all its majesty and might, Scotland in its wild unkempt hardiness and indomitable courage.

Emperor stands on guard, with head erect—expectant.

Gael looks up and growls.

"I thought," Gael seemed to say, "that I had slain you already, that you were dead and in your grave long ago."

"And I," replied the great mastiff, without lowering his head or altering his statue-like form, "was quite as convinced I had done for you."

"I've half a mind to kill you over again," said Gael, his teeth flashing white in the moonlight, "but there! I'll spare you for this once. You may keep your worthless life."

Then Gael dropped quietly to the rear—he had made "peace with honour," and perhaps that was all the little rascal desired.

Then big Emperor must needs jump joyfully up and give his master's ear a lick.

"There, master," he appeared to say, "it is all amicably arranged. Little Scottie Spitfire and I will be the very best of friends in future."

And so it really turned out.



CHAPTER X.

FRED'S FIRST VENTURE IN LIVE STOCK— WHITE MICE.

FRED'S father came up to the cottage garden one Thursday afternoon shortly after that memorable visit to the Hall.

He was smiling very pleasantly, and rubbing his palms together.

“Now comes the tug of war, Fred, my lad,” he said. “Hang up the fiddle and the bow, lay down the shovel and the hoe.” You’re off to Aberdeen to-morrow for the first time in charge of market produce.”

“Hurrah!” cried Fred, “that will be glorious. Here, Borlem, take in all these tools and shut the garden gate to keep out the cows. I suppose you want me to help to get things ready for the start, father?”

“That’s precisely what I do want, Fred.”

So away went father and son side by side.

Thursday evening was always a busy one at the farm of Kildeer. The railway-station was many miles away, and everything had to be got ready and packed the night before, so as not to miss the early morning train.

To-night, therefore, Fred was very busy; Jeannie was busy; Joe, the orra man, was busy, for he was driver; Mrs. Hallam herself was busy in the kitchen; while young Borlem ran about at the beck and call of all hands.

Fred's father took him into the drawing-room, and gave him the purse and all commands and advice as to where to go and what to do. Like most paymasters that belong to, or ever have belonged to, our most glorious service, the Royal Navy, Mr. Hallam was most particular in matters of business. And Fred knew this well; so, not content to trust his memory with one-half his father's instructions, he took all his orders down in a note-book.

With her own white hands Mrs. Hallam made up the fresh butter, which Jeannie had churned that very afternoon, into beautifully-shaped pound and half-pound pieces, and stamped each one. The huge basket that was to contain it was carefully lined with green dock leaves, and with the same the butter was covered up. But there were jars of cream to go to market, besides garden produce—huge white brocoli, parsnips, onions, and leeks. Meanwhile, out of doors Joe was getting ready the spring-cart and cleaning up his harness, making the leather shine like Whitby jet and the brass like burnished gold. Then he arranged the seat in the cart, and even put cushions on it, and lots of dry, clean, yellow straw in the bottom of the cart.

Very early indeed next morning little Borlem found

his way upstairs to Fred's room and shook him by the shoulder. The lad was all alive in a minute, and out of bed in two.

He dressed by the light of Borlem's tallow dip, with even more care than usual, and after saying his prayers hurried below.

He was hardly surprised to find Lilly down before him. He knew she was anxious, and he was going a very long and, as she thought, dangerous journey. So it is no wonder her face was wet with tears when Fred bade her good-bye. He sprang into the cart, and away they rattled.

It was a delightfully fresh and bracing morning, though very early. A quarter-moon in the sky afforded a glimmering, ghostly sort of a light, and the stars twinkled as merrily as they had done at midnight.

But some time before they reached the distant station a glimmer of yellow light, like the reflection of a great fire, appeared above the south-eastern sky. It broadened and broadened, the stars paled before it, the moon was dimmed, and ere long never a star was visible. One long narrow cloud of fiery crimson lay on the horizon, and in a few minutes more the sun sailed slowly up over the hills, and everything betokened a lovely day.

The New Market, Aberdeen, is a very spacious building, indeed, high and wide, and long enough to have formed a Roman arena, had it been built in the days the Romans conquered England and a portion of bold

Scotland. In the great hall that lies on a level with the street, or a little above it, are arranged, on Fridays, many rows of stalls and seats all filled with country produce, each stall backed by some modest rosy lassie, the servant or mayhap the daughter of a farmer. It was Jeannie who sold the butter and garden stuff from the farm of Kildeer, and as soon as he had seen her seated, off went Fred to transact his father's business. This took him up and down many streets and into many strange shops, and by the time he had quite finished he was more than ready for his dinner. He had a look into the New Market, however, first and foremost, to see how Jeannie was getting on, and was surprised to find the stall empty—everything sold.

Fred felt all a man when he received and counted the money, and handed Jeannie over the price of her dinner, arranging to meet her at the station for the four o'clock train.

After he had enjoyed his own meal he set out to make his purchases.

The half-crown was to be spent at last!

Union Street, with its long rows of silver-white granite houses, looked glorious in the sunshine; but Fred paused not to admire it. He found a "naturalist's" shop at last, and boldly entered. The odour was not Rimmelian, nor were the noises the birds and beasts made very pleasant to listen to. The poor wee caged dogs looked sadly woebegone, the rabbits and cavies moped in their dens, and hardly a bird in all the

large collection seemed to care to sing. The foreign birds hopped about uneasily from perch to perch, giving vent now and then to a kind of peevish twitter. Blackbirds, thrushes, and larks sat blinking at the sunshine out of doors, as if they longed to get out into it, and fly away and away to the greenery of the fields and woods.

A magpie in a wicker cage eyed Fred impudently as he came in. Perhaps he thought the boy was going to buy him. Had Fred been rich enough he thought he should like to buy all the British birds, and take them off home to the pine forest.

A strange, little, round-faced fat man came to the counter to wait on Fred. He talked as if he had no nose, and could not pronounce the letter M otherwise than as a B.

“Bice, sir,” he said; “yes, sir, I’ve sobe very pretty bice.”

“Bary, by dear,” he cried in a louder key, “brig up sobe bice.”

And Mary, his daughter, perhaps, produced at least half a dozen cages.

Fred was surprised at the beauty of some of these, and at their charming colours. In his innocence he had imagined there were only one sort—the pure white; but here were piebald mice, fawn-coloured mice, red-gray mice, lavender-coloured mice, and tortoise-shell mice. And how happy and merry they all looked too, and no bad odour about their cages either, for, as

the man explained, they were fed exclusively on canary-seed.

Fred was particularly struck with the appearance and elegance of the tortoise-shell mice.

"How many," he asked the man anxiously, "can I have of these for two shillings?"

Mary tittered. The "naturalist" elevated his brows, then laughed outright.

"These tortoise-shell mice," he explained, "are twedty shilligs a pair."

"Twenty shillings a pair!" cried Fred; and that half-crown of his did feel wonderfully small just then.

But this man was not a bad-hearted fellow after all, for as Fred was a young beginner he agreed to let him have for his two shillings and sixpence one pair of pure white mice and a pair consisting of a black mouse and a white one; also an extra cage.

"For," said this funny man, "you'll very likely deal here agaid."

But when Fred asked him if he would buy his young mice, when he had any, the man shook his round head.

"You'g sir," he said, "buyig is wad thig, sellig is adother."

Fred cast a longing, lingering glance at the guinea-pigs, and then bidding the man a pleasant good-day, he sallied forth with his purchases rolled in paper, and walked off to the station to meet Jeannie.

Fred, one way or another, had had rather a weary-
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ing day of it, and glad indeed he was when he saw again the lights of the dear old farm streaming up the loanings. He next saw the back-door opened, and right well he knew that Lilly had been anxiously awaiting his arrival.

"Have you got them?" That was Lilly's very first question after the fraternal kiss of welcome.

"Yes, old Lill," replied Fred, putting the parcel carefully into her arms.

Then he hurried away to the drawing-room to see his father, and give account of his stewardship.

His father was much pleased, and gave the lad six-pence.

"You've earned it, lad," he said, "or you wouldn't have it."

Fred and Lilly and Jeannie stood for fully half an hour admiring those mice, and Gael was exceedingly anxious to see them also, but did not.

Then Fred suddenly remembered that he was not only excessively hungry, but exceedingly tired.

And never before had his own fireside looked so cheerful to the boy as it did that night.

He was the proud owner of live stock at last; so it is small wonder that when he went to bed that night he dreamt that he had purchased four white elephants, and was hunting cassowaries on the plains of Timbuctoo in company with Virgil, Horace, and the bullet-headed naturalist who spoke as if he had got no nose.

“Well, Lilly,” said Fred next morning as they sat together at breakfast, “I really had a fine time of it in Aberdeen; and the only thing I was sorry for was that you weren’t there.”

“No, and I should like to go.”

“Well, some day you must.”

“It’s a nice town, isn’t it?”

“*Town*, Lilly! It is a *city*. Cathedral in the old town, and University buildings in both. The streets are wide and spacious, and snow-white, Lilly. Don’t forget that, snow-white; and they say that on a clear moonlight night Union Street and King Street, seen from the old cross, look like streets in fairyland, with their long chains of golden lights and their walls that look as if built of frosted silver.”

“It must be beautiful!”

“And the University building, called Marischal College, I went and had a look at that. That is also built of granite. And, Lilly, I met many students on the streets in their scarlet gowns, and—and—”

“And what, Fred?”

“O, well,” said Fred with half a sigh, “not much, Lilly; only somehow I couldn’t help wishing, just for a moment, Lilly, that—that I was one of them.”

“But you can’t be now, can you, Fred, because you are going to be a farmer?”

“Well, yes, I’ve chosen that line of life; for, oh, dear silly Lilly, I don’t feel half good enough to become a minister.”

"I think you good enough for anything, Fred."

"Hush, Lill! You have no idea what you are talking about. Come, let us change the subject.

"Well, Lill," he continued after a minute's pause, "I thought of you when in Mr. Duncan's shop. He calls himself a naturalist, you know. I think it such impudence for any of those bird-stuffing fellows to stick naturalist on their signs. Only mind you, Lilly, Duncan isn't half a bad fellow, although he does speak as if he hadn't a nose; and he told me all about feeding and treating these white mice, and I took out my notebook and jotted it all down briefly."

"Yes, Fred; what is the food?"

"Don't laugh, Lilly, and I'll read it for you."

Fred reads: "Biscuits dry, bread and bilk, duts, cadary-seed, and graids of all kyds."

Lilly could not well help laughing, but she said: "O, Fred, isn't it wrong to mock the poor man?" •

"You're right, sister, so I sha'n't do it again. Well, he told me that though he said grains of all kinds, I musn't give much wheat nor lint nor hemp, because these are heating and fattening, and cause them to have an unpleasant smell. 'Udpleasadt sbell' he called it."

"Hush, Fred!"

"The cage was to be kept very clean, sawdust put in the bottom, and this changed every day."

"How interesting! We'll have something to do. Fred!"

"Yes, and you must be my partner, and help me when you are not at lessons."

"Gladly, Fred."

"And we will make oceans of money! Don't smile, Lilly. You think you are wiser than I; but I assure you I can see mother's pony-carriage looming in the distant future, and mother in it too, and you and papa, with myself as whip."

"Should we have a wheel-cage?"

"No, no. I asked about that, and he said such contrivances were cruel and 'abobidably sidful.'"

"He must be a good man."

"Yes, I think he is. I don't think, mind you, that anybody could be constantly in the company of God's creatures, and remain a hard-hearted man."

"Well, Lill, you notice that in the cage there is a little dark room with a pop-hole through the partition between that and the little run; that is the sleeping apartment, and a little clean tow or nice soft shavings will make a bed."

"O, I'm sure all will come right."

"Yes, if we feed regularly and keep clean. Duncan said three times a day. Stale bread and fresh milk in the morning in their little dishes; grains scattered for them at mid-day; and biscuit, bread, rice, or barley at night. Or now and then canary-seed for a treat. O, I can assure you he told me a lot; and do you know what he said also, Lill?"

"No, Fred."

"He said that by and by I would very likely be keeping other animals, bigger ones, and that the same rules of treatment, in the main, must be attended to, if we wish to do any good at all with them. I wrote the words down here in my note-book, and I'm going to write them on a card and stick them up in a conspicuous place in my cottage:—CLEANLINESS. PROPER FOOD. REGULAR FEEDING. CHANGE OF DIET. QUIET. EXERCISE. WARMTH. WATER AND VENTILATION.

"But, Lilly, you should have seen the guinea-pigs. O, such funny things, and such pretty, pert, wee things the rough-coated ones were! They looked as if they had just come away from the barber's, and as if the barber had been a little cow, that had licked their hair this way and that way, all in wrong directions."

"I'm sure I shall love to go to Aberdeen."

"Well, Lill, some fine summer's day I'll take you. And now, as we have fed the mousies, and I've seen to the fowls, and to Meg the sow, suppose you and I take a walk over to old Donald's. I haven't seen the poor man since I took back his clothes."

"O, that will be nice!"

"I can do some gardening in the afternoon; only father says Saturday should always be a play day with us."

When Lilly met her brother at his cottage about an hour afterwards, she found him ready for the road. He had his botanical case slung across his shoulder.

"Are you going to collect specimens?" she asked.

"I might, if I came across anything queer," said Fred; "but Jeannie has crammed the case with bread and cheese, and put in a bottle of milk. She is so mindful."

"Yes; I wouldn't have thought of that."

The day was fine and the ground dry, with a mild west wind blowing. Already the farmers were getting the land ready for crops of oats, and lazy-looking horses walked hither and thither in the ploughed fields, dragging harrows behind them.

The dogs and Sandie's heron wished to accompany the young folks on their ramble, but only Torlath was allowed to come, because he was a dog of a peaceable disposition, and had no desire to throw down the gauntlet to every individual of his own species he might meet on the road.

Fred led the way, quickly leaving the main roads and making direct for the pine-wood. Only a few birds had yet begun to build, but the hoody crow was busy at it, so was a magpie, who had taken possession of an old nest which probably had belonged to a hoody.

"Chickerick, chickerick, chickerick!" she shouted to Fred from the tree.

"Do you know what she is saying, Lill? I do. She is telling us to go about our business. That we are rude, ill-bred children to stare so."

"Chickerick, chickerick, chickerick!"

"Come on, Lill. We mustn't annoy her, or she may desert the nest. It is only an old one, but with a

bit of clay and a new lining of soft grass, she thinks it will do very well for one season, and save no end of trouble."

"Are magpies unlucky?"

"Not in a tree, Lilly. But if they sit on the road before you, and fly on a little way and sit again and cry 'Chickerick,' I believe some sorrow usually follows."

"I hope we won't meet any then," said Lilly.

In a low spruce-tree in a thicket, early though the season was, they found a blackbird's nest, grass-lined, and also a warm clay-lined thrush's. Both had eggs in them. Pigeons were also busy at work in high fir and spruce trees, and their mournful croodling could be heard sounding from every part of the wood.

They reached Donald's shieling at last, and the old man at once opened the door when Fred tapped.



has he? Well, you must be a good lassie, for Tom is a wonderful judge of human character."

The old man now sat down, and the conversation soon became general. Lilly was astonished at the cleverness of his discourse, and enjoyed it ever so much. To be sure Donald's coat and his shoes had been patched and re-patched, till there was scarcely a morsel of the original material visible. Lilly did not heed that. She saw before her only a kindly, old, red face, a long white beard, and bright, gentle eyes of lightest blue. He chatted right merrily. He told them stories of his past life and the wars of olden times, of battles by sea, and of storms and shipwrecks, and all in language so telling, though quaint, that the youngest child could have known he spoke only the plain unexaggerated truth.

Lilly was spell-bound.

Fred would have stayed and listened to his conversation till sundown.

"May I ask how old you are, sir?" said Fred.

"You may, laddie, you may. What should you think my years were?"

"About sixty."

"Well, they do say I don't look more, but I scored eighty-and-five last June."

"Ah! but," he added, "I've taken good care of myself. Would you like to know how to live long?"

"I think I should, sir," replied Fred.

"Well, I won't burden your young memory by

saying much, but just you mind this, my laddie: the mind has much to do with the body. Try then to be always looking at the bright side of things. Be cheerful. Never worry. No matter how *you* are, there are people in the world worse off than you. What says the Good Book? 'Who by taking thought can add one inch to his stature?' Never get angry. Anger injures the brain and shortens life. Many and many a man has dropped down dead in a fit of passion. Think only the purest thoughts. As you think, laddie, so shall you be while awake by day, and in your dreams at night. Cultivate healthy, good companions. I said never worry, and I add, never hurry overmuch. Be temperate in eating and drinking, and in your pleasures. Have a roll in the river every morning of your life. If you can't have that have a splash in a tub. Live day and night in fresh air; and lastly, don't forget this, work is life, and sleep is life. That's all, boy."

"Many thanks, sir! I'll try to profit by all you tell me."

"Now you'll have a drink of goat's milk. I really wouldn't know what to do if it wasn't for Nanny, and my fowls and potato patch"

The milk was delicious.

Old Duncan told them he fed and watered Nanny regularly, and, wet day or dry day, always had her out, and that she had a comfortable, clean, dry house to live in, with oceans of bedding, and that she was as happy as the summer days were long.

Fred was glancing at Donald's book-shelf.

There were few books there—a big, old Bible, a history of Nelson, some books on seamanship, a magazine or two, and a *very, very* old book of large dimensions called, *Looking unto Jesus*.

This Donald took down, and, mounting a huge pair of horn-rimmed spectacles on his nose, opened it.

"It is a precious volume to an old man," he said, "but here is what puzzles me. These old divines would put in pieces of Latin. Well, that is all Greek to me."

A bright thought occurred to Fred.

"I know something of Latin," he said, "and if you'll allow me I'll run over here sometimes of a Saturday evening, and write out those passages for you in English."

The old man looked at him over his glasses, and his eye had brightened.

"If you do," he said, "you'll have an aged man's blessing."

"And may I come too sometimes?" lisped Lilly.

"Ah! pussy, yes," replied Donald, patting her head and smiling. "I'll be so pleased."

So the brother and sister bade old Donald adieu and started for home.

On their way back to Kildeer, by the hedge-side that ran along one side of the pine-wood, they came upon two trusty friends. These were Gilbert Bruce and Gael, the spitfire terrier. They were evidently on

the hunt, and playing into each other's hands, if one may so speak.

The affection that had lately sprung up between these two animals was somewhat remarkable, yet, as those who keep pets will be aware, not at all unusual. Such instances surely give the lie to the proverb—begotten of ignorance and popular fallacy—"a cat-and-dog life." Well, many a morning of late little Gael had been missed. He had been away all day, but towards sunset he and Gilbert Bruce would be seen coming home side by side and shoulder to shoulder.

Who proposed this plan of hunting together in pair, I wonder? The cat or the dog? It is evident enough that each fully appreciated the assistance and experience of the other. Dogs often hunt together at night in the country, making appointments evidently, meeting at a trysting-place, and scouring a field as carefully and as scientifically as a poacher would. As a rule one hunts up and down through a crop of say oats or turnips, while the other lies in watch by the stile. When hotly pursued by the dog in the field, the hare or rabbit nearly always make for the gate, for a second or two might be lost in making the spring to clear the fence. As he passes through the stile or gate, he rushes into the very jaws of the dog on sentry, and it is all over with him.

Rats and mice were probably the game that Gael and Gibbie looked after chiefly, though the cat often dragged home a young rabbit. Whether or not he

himself had killed it I cannot say, but he invariably carried it. He brought it straight into the house and threw it down in front of the kitchen fire, and I greatly fear that Jeannie invariably encouraged these poaching exploits, by smoothing Gibbie and giving him what he liked better than anything else, a large saucer of warm milk with sugar in it.

On the present occasion, when Torlath saw the cat and Gael so busy at the hedge side he naturally wished to join the hunt, and with eyes and tail asked Fred if he might. But Fred said "No," so the tail and ears were lowered in disappointment. Fred tried to induce Gael to come with him home.

Gael took not the slightest notice. He was in a huff. He was on his high key, and cut his master dead, as one might say.

"You went off without me in the morning," he seemed to say, "and now I want to have nothing to do with you. Go home with Torlath. You can take *him* everywhere, though you can't take *me*."

For a day or two after his visit to the home of the Rowlands Fred turned his attention once more to his cottage and garden. There was still a good deal to be done before it was complete.

But really it already looked most promising and pretty.

That summer-house must be built, however, and this was a great undertaking. But Fred comforted himself

with the thought, that so long as the place looked cosy, it could not well be too rustic in appearance.

"Some portions of Kildeer wood want thinning badly, father," said the lad one morning at breakfast.

"Yes, my boy," was the reply; "and you want to build a summer-house, don't you?"

"That I do," said Fred, "very much."

"Well, there's an axe and a saw, and a barrow, and there is Borlem; have all the lot. Take a young tree, larch or pine, out here and there where they are thickest. Not all from the same corner."

"O no, father, I know that."

"And there are nails about, and a hammer. Now, are you happy?"

Fred smiled his reply, but was off next minute.

"I am really glad, Gertrude, that the boy is taking to hobbies. I don't think, mind you, that Fred would ever turn out a scapegrace; but hobbies, fads, or fancies, call them what you like, Gerty, have saved many a boy from ruin."

"Yes," said his wife; "and I only wonder fathers do not encourage their boys more in this way."

"So do I, Gertrude."

"Borlem, you young scamp!" cried Fred, peeping in at the byre door, where the boy was busy attending to sanitary arrangements behind the cows.

"That's me, maister."

"Well, are you done cleaning out the 'greep' yet?"

"I'll be deen in a jiffey."

"Look smart, then, and come up to the cottage after me."

With his two-foot rule and note-book in hand Fred was busy marking off the corner where the summer-house was to stand, when young Borlem appeared upon the scene.

He was not much to look at, this youthful brother of Jeannie's. Probably he was fully as old as Fred himself, but he was excessively small for his years. He was broad in beam, however, and really as sturdy and strong almost as a young Shetland pony. His dress was a sleeved waistcoat that had belonged to Sandie, and so made quite a coat for Borlem, a pair of somewhat ragged cord breeches that did not reach to his naked ankles, and a glengarry bonnet pulled down out of all shape. There was a hole in the top of the cap where the red worsted knap had been, and out through this hole there invariably protruded a lock of Borlem's tow-coloured towsy hair. But the strangest thing is this: neither during the winter nor summer did Borlem ever wear shoes or stockings. His hard-soled naked feet were far more hardy than his brown hands, and that is saying a good deal. In summer the boy's feet would be red, in winter they were nearly always blue.

Such was Borlem; but he had a very good-natured face, and would have done anything in the world for Fred.

"So here ye are?"

"Ay, ay, jist that."

"Well, get the barrow, and you'll be my horse. We're going to the wood."

"Gaun to the wud! Man, that'll be fine!"

Those larch-trees were really very thick at one corner. But indeed they hardly deserved the name of trees. They had been all struggling together and racing skywards to get a blink of the beautiful sunshine. So they were scarcely thicker, next to the roots, than Fred's Highland leg.

It took the boys all the forenoon to select and trim the little trees and branches they needed for the summer-house. They did all the pointing and shaping and everything in the wood so as to save making a litter at home.

By sunset everything was safe in Fred's garden, and next day, still with Borlem as able assistant, the work of building was commenced.

"Simplicity, Borlem, simplicity," said Fred; "there is nothing like it. Simplicity and rusticity, eh, Borlem?"

"Man," replied little Borlem, "I ha'ena learnt Greek yet, mair's the pity. I ha'ena learnt Greek nor unco muckle (too much) English. I can jist manage to read ma Robbie Burns and worry through the Psalms o' Dauvid."

"Well, hold this post till I drive it home."

Post after post was put up, and soon Fred had all his uprights in. The arbour was to be a little higher in front, and sloping off behind. The posts being put

up, cross beams were nailed from one to the other. The nice smooth bark was left on the larch saplings and branches, and this looked all the better.

The uprights and couplings having been nailed on, next came the more artistic work of filling in the whole with smaller branches, nailed slantingly across and across in a kind of tartaned trellis-work.

How quickly the time flew while Fred was thus engaged; and I am sure he was happy, for when not talking and laughing with Borlem he was singing snatches of song to himself.

It was dinner-time before either of them could have believed it possible. But by this time the whole shell of the summer-house was finished. The front had not of course been all left open; there was simply a doorway, the sides and top formed of smaller larch saplings, with trellis-work of branchlets nailed from these to the main uprights and to the roof. So the whole looked very pretty indeed.

For three more days Fred worked "between whiles," as Borlem phrased it, at his summer-house. By "between whiles" is meant in the intervals that could be spared from his other farm duties.

By the end of this time he had made a rustic larch-branch seat inside, and constructed a little table on which he could write or read in summer. The construction of this table was perhaps the most easy piece of work the boy had to do. He first planted a strong thick upright right in the centre of the arbour, ham-

mering it well down, and leaving it about twenty-eight inches out of the ground, then he nailed on top of this the smoothed and planed bottom of a large soda-tub, and lo, the table was made! He afterwards gave it two thick coats of very dark green paint, however, and then it looked smart indeed.

When he was tired admiring his work—and who could blame him? such pride was but natural—he proceeded to trail over it a huge long-branched *Gloire de Dijon* rose-bush. The bush had been planted long before, and pegged to the ground while the arbour was being built. At the other side were two of those sweet wee button roses, with their terribly thorny stems, that are called Scotch. One would have yellow blooms, the other pure white. He now planted here also a very large plant of honeysuckle. He had been lucky in finding such a bush, and having to take it up with a very big ball of earth to save the roots, it was quite a forenoon's work.

Well, all these flowers would look lovely when ablaze with their blossoms; but Fred had not done yet. He had dug up from a hedge-foot a huge root of white bryony (*Bryonia alba*), sometimes called the devil's parsnip. This he planted in a hole right behind the summer-house, and now all was complete. That bryony would, before the summer was far advanced, quite overshadow the arbour with leaves of tender green and sheets of little white-green flowers, and in autumn it would be one glorious mass of little crimson berries.

Fred one fine afternoon had taken Lilly up to see his arbour. During the time it had been building she had not been permitted to come near the place.

“Silly Lillies,” he had told her, “mustn’t see things half done,” which was only a softened paraphrase of a very old proverb.

It is needless to say that Lilly was delighted. But while the two stood at the garden gate, looking at the arbour and planning little delightful reading and chess parties within its cool shade, in the sweet summer-time, a huge head was thrust unceremoniously under Lilly’s arm, and lo! there stood the mastiff Emperor.

Gael ran to meet him, and positively jumped up to kiss him.

“I find,” Gael said, “that you’re not half a bad fellow, though you are absurdly ugly and ungainly, so I sha’n’t thrash you nor kill you any more.”

Emperor put his great nose under Gael’s stomach, and in a friendly sort of way tumbled the wee wiry terrier over on his back.

Gael sprang up and looked somewhat serious for a moment or two.

“I say, you know,” he seemed to say, “just a little more ceremony had better be maintained between us in our future intercourse.”

Fred and Lilly both went to meet Captain Rowland, who was not far behind.

He had come to ask the boy to accompany him up Don for an afternoon’s fishing. It is needless to say

that Fred went gladly, and he was proud to be able to show the jolly captain all the very best and most likely salmon pools, so that they spent a very pleasant afternoon indeed, and the boy came home with a fish which, held on one end, was nearly as tall as Borlem.

This was only the first of many a happy evening spent by the banks of the winding Don.





CHAPTER XII.

"THAT MOUSE IS A GENIUS," SAID FRED—BORLEM HAS AN IDEA—"ILKA LITTLE HELPS THE MICKLE."

GLOAMING had begun to deepen into night by the time Captain Rowland and Fred stopped to say "Good-bye" at the little cottage gate. ~~But~~ there was still light enough to see things.

"I don't know what to do with that ~~stone~~ stone dyke," said Fred. "It is very ugly, isn't it, sir?"

"My dear boy," answered the captain, "its ugliness can be taken advantage of. I wouldn't exchange it for the best hedge in Scotland. You can make it a thing of beauty and a joy for years."

"Can I, sir? How?"

Fred's face was brightening now.

"Why, you have only to stick pieces of a compost of clay, earth, peat, and fine sand in here and there and plant things in it. You can turn it into one long lovely rockery."

"I never thought of that before."

"Have you any wallflower?"

"Plenty."

"House-leek, and stone-crop, and auriculas."

"Yes; all except the auriculas."

"Well, I'll make my gardener send you more stuff. Don't bother me with thanks, boy. The flowers I send are little more than weeds to us. Besides," and here the kindly captain pointed to his basket, "would I have been carrying home this lordly fish to-night if it hadn't been for you? I'm your debtor, my lad. You've worked for the flowers, and are right welcome."

Captain Rowland was as good as his word, and I may say here and be done with it, that the rough, loose, stone wall in a few months' time, was indeed a thing of beauty, and a very astonishing one too, for over it trailed the gold of the charming stone-crop in dense masses. Wallflowers, dark red, yellow, and crimson, grew and bloomed on its tops and sides. The blue-green of house-leek was here too, and pinks and London-pride, and the deliciously-scented Alpine auriculas, which Borlem called "dusty millers."

It was a suggestion from the captain, also, that all along the fence in the inside, Fred should form a flowery hedge, that, although it could only last a summer, would be very pretty indeed. And this was simply a row of scarlet and white runners (French beans). It was rather a difficult matter to keep the snails and slugs from feeding on the young plants when they first came up; but Fred succeeded even here, for all round them he placed a mixture of soot and sawdust, and no slug or snail dared cross this, any more than a witch or a warlock can cross a running stream.

With larch saplings our youthful gardener had also erected at the gate a beautiful rustic arch, and two or three across the walks in the garden itself. To trail over these, he planted roots of the white bryony at one side and French beans at the other.

But he made more even than this of these beautiful climbers, for near the gate at each corner he planted a small dead Scotch pine, after carefully removing the needles. He sowed sweet-peas and runners at the foot, and in autumn those little trees seemed dead no longer, but instinct with beauty and life.

Fred found another climber, and it was not only a cheap one but one of great loveliness. It was simply the ordinary bind-weed, or wild convolvulus that one sees in summer trailing over the country hedges.

Well, Sandie dug buckets-ful of the long, white, budding roots of these and brought them to Fred, and the lad early in March made a little trench all along the front of the cottage, about nine inches from the wall, and half-filled it with nice, short, warm manure, then laid all along it, four or five deep—like as many pipe-stalks—the roots that Sandie had found for him. Then the trench was carefully covered up. Strings were then arranged from eave to ground, about one foot apart, from end to end of the cottage front. And lo! even in April these wild convolvuli had burst through the ground, and were running skywards up the strings, twining *against* the sun. By the middle of June they had covered all the wall with their

broad, heart-shaped green leaves so that not a bit of it was visible. They threw out, too, huge, white, half-bell-shaped flowers that look gorgeous in the sunshine, although they twisted up and went to sleep every evening before the gloaming star peeped out.

As soon as Fred had finished his decorations of the stone fences and planted his beans, he turned his attention to making a pretty rockery at each corner of the gravel sweep in front of the house. He put down many barrows-ful of earth, first arranging them into dome-shaped heaps, and on these two heaps, old logs of wood, and big rough stones, were planted artistically the flowers.

These two rockeries—so simple and easy of construction—gave brother and sister pleasure for years after they had been made and planted. Here in early spring-time bloomed snowdrops, crocuses, and primroses; later on came sky-blue scillas, lovely ranunculus, dreamy wind-flowers (anemones) and dwarf tulips, and hyacinths of the most charming tints and colours. Auriculas, too, and primulas and polyanthus, with here and there morsels of the golden-green pyrethrums. Then in spring the ferns that grew among the rocks, put forth their brown fingers and unfolded their feathery fronds.

In summer the earlier spring flowers were carefully removed, and among the ferns now bloomed a lovely selection of geraniums, carnations, asters, marigolds, and flowers too numerous to name. And so on through

all the autumn, till in drear November the chrysanthemums, crimson, yellow, and white, held up their sweet faces to be kissed by the passing winds.

Fred found many beautiful wild flowers in the wood that he transferred to his garden. Chief of these were tall and stately foxgloves, whose rich red bells contrasted so prettily against the breckans which the boy had planted here and there near the fence to bear them company, so that they scarcely missed their woodland homes.

It was not until everything was completed in the way of planting and digging, that the gravel—rich yellow stuff it was—had been put down.

After that Lilly and Fred, as they took tea one evening in the little arbour, agreed that the whole place was as nearly like what Paradise must have been, as anything they could think of.

“I say, Lilly,” said Fred after one of those quiet, thinking intervals he was prone to indulge in, “I’m of opinion that our old dad is just about the best father, take him all in all, that ever lived.”

And Lilly agreed with Fred.

All this time, however, the mice had not been forgotten. Their food was always given to them as fresh as fresh could be; they were regularly turned out into a clean cage every second day so that they might have the other cleaned. So tame were they now that they suffered themselves to be gently lifted out. As soon

as they found that they were transferred to the fresh cage, they commenced one of their indescribably funny gambols. More playful than kittens were they, because the antics they indulged in were quainter and queerer.

Fred and Lilly used to think that these gambols were often indulged in to please them, and probably they were not far wrong. There is a deal that might be called human even about a mouse, and a mouse, like a man, is often inclined vaingloriously to "show off" when he thinks people are looking at him.

But really the young Hallams were exceedingly kind to their pets. And they never went to the fields or woods without picking up something for them, and whether it was a nut or an acorn or a few grains of wheat—*old* wheat, not *new*, for new wheat would swell and hurt them—it was thankfully received, played with, perhaps, for a time, and afterwards eaten or hidden.

The "mousies" did not have everything they would have liked. A bit of toasted cheese or a morsel of Welsh rabbit would have made their little hearts go pit-a-pat with joy; but it was seldom indeed they had any. Only, when teaching them tricks this was usually the reward, though at times a few grains of canary-seed were given instead.

The black mouse proved somewhat of a dunce, but the pure white one was clever. "That mouse is a genius," said Fred. Almost the first day that the boy erected

a little flag-staff on the table with a tiny French flag on top, its handle rubbed with toasted cheese and tallow, little Muggins, as he was called, as soon as told to run away aloft and haul down the French flag, swarmed up the pole, as many a bold Jack-o'-Tar has swarmed up a mast before now on the same errand, and brought down the flag in a twinkling. Then came the reward. Muggins soon got used to this trick, and would run up the pole even when no flag was there. Then he would sit on the truck—right on top, I mean—and wash his wee face and paws, or try to look like a Greenland bear.

"Muggins is so clever," said Fred one day, "that I think I shall make him the chief of my performing mice."

Meanwhile, for various reasons which I need not name, Fred was in weekly expectation of having an increase of his stock, so he turned his attention to cage-making.

It is small marvel that Fred considered his old dad about the kindest father that ever lived, for he had recently presented him with a nice box of tools, alleging as a reason for this munificence the fact that the boy had made such a thorough revolution in the poultry run, and induced the fowls to lay as if by magic. Their house was kept clean, nests clean, dust-bath provided, and plenty of clean, clear, soft water given, with judicious diet.

Under Borlem's administration there were always

two or three hens with white faces and drooping wings, huddled away in a corner or pecked at and chased by the others, for I grieve to say that fowls have but small sympathy with each other when sick. Other fowls would be too fat to lay, others again had bumble-foot, and all more or less had dyspepsia. Now each fowl in the run looked more independent than another. They all had jolly red faces of their own, and Mr. Hallam never sat down a single morning to breakfast, without having before him on the table one or two eggs so fresh, that when the top was taken off the milk ran out of them.

Borlem was a willing young rascal, but, as Sandie M'Byres said often enough, Borlem had "but a sma' share o' brains."

So Fred had his box of tools, and deserved them. Now the cages Fred made were by no means difficult to construct. For one thing, he had a pattern to go by, and that was a very great help. He had to buy some wire and tacks, and that was about all the outlay. His father was a good customer to the grocer down at the village, so the boy got blacking and starch boxes simply for the asking, or for "thanks" alone.

The fronts of these were strengthened at the sides, a piece of wood nailed across at the top, and they were then wired very neatly. A little dark room was left at one side with a pop-hole in the partition, according to pattern, with the wooden top wire-hinged; but the

other part of the lid was a wire frame to lift off or up, and this covered the mousies' court-yard or gambolling-ground.

Although Borlem certainly did not possess enough brains to entitle him to rank as a genius, still in that workshop in the cottage he soon began to show himself quite an adept at carpentry and cage-making. So in the forenights Fred and he completed quite a pile of cages.

After these were nicely dried they were all stained dark-green. Paint might have been dangerous, but the dark colour would show off the beauty of the little inmates to perfection.

Fred went regularly to Aberdeen now on Friday, and he never failed to have a look into his friend Duncan's shop. Thus he gained many and many a useful hint, not only about the keeping of pets, but even about bird-stuffing.

Nor did the boy go to see his friend empty-handed. He always took him a nice lot of green stuff, or seedling plantain for his birds. Delicious juicy chickweed, groundsel, and tender lettuce-leaves were much relished. In addition to this he sometimes brought a pocketful of barley.

It soon occurred to Fred that a few pence might be made by putting bunches of green stuff for birds on Jeannie's stand in the market-place. He tried it one Friday and was eminently successful. He had made the chickweed and groundsel into pretty little penny

sheaves, binding each with a bit of coloured paper, and the store was all sold out before twelve o'clock, and several kindly-faced old ladies gave orders for more to come on the Friday following.

Fred made a shilling "clear cash" that first day, and this, too, after paying radiant-faced Jeannie the large sum of twopence for her trouble.

And the lad was so delighted with this first commercial success of his, that he told Borlem about it while the two were together in the workshop next day.

Borlem was silent for quite a long time after.

Borlem was thinking.

When Borlem had made an end of thinking, he opened his mouth and spoke—words of wisdom too.

"Maister," said Borlem, "I've a notion."

"That means you've an idea. Well, out with it, Borlem; it's the first idea ever you had in your life."

"Ah! but, man; maister, this is a fine notion if you want to mak' a curn (few) bawbees."

"That I do, my boy, because I want to go in for rats and guinea-pigs. What's the notion then?"

"Brooms!" said Borlem solemnly.

Fred raised his eyebrows wonderingly, inquiringly.

"Brooms!" repeated Borlem emphatically.

"I'm somewhat doubtful about making and selling brooms, Borlem."

"O!" said Borlem, "I dinna mean heather besoms. Bide a wee, maister, and I'll mak' ane."

There grows in the marshy parts of moors in bonnie Scotland a very long bright green soft kind of moss, which is often made into flat carpet brushes, and it was to this that little Borlem referred.

He brought a broom of this sort to Fred a few hours after, and really it was a natty, neat, and well-finished article.

Fred thanked him.

"But, Borlem," he added, "I must first consult father. You know he has been an officer in the Royal Navy, and swung about Her Majesty's quarter-decks with a great long sword at his heels and a cocked hat on his head. Perhaps, you see, he might think it far beneath him to permit his son to make and sell *brooms*, Borlem."

"Man!" replied Borlem with considerably dignity, "if my fadder (father) were a king's son instead o' an auld stane-mason, I'd mak' brooms and besoms tae, if I could get the bawbees for them."

Fred took the broom in his hand that same evening and marched into his father's presence with it.

"What do you think of that, Dad?" he asked.

"Capital! Who made it? You?"

"No; Borlem. I could make lots of them and Jeannie could sell them, but—but—"

"Ah!" laughed his father, "you think it would be *infra dig* for an officer's son.* Is that it?"

"That's it precisely, Daddy."

"Well, Fred, do as you please. But, my dear boy,

there is a dignity about honest labour that in my opinion lends a more glorious lustre to the work of our own hands, than that which shimmers around the diadem of prince or peer."

Fred smiled, still a little doubtful.

"It seems strange, doesn't it, father," he said, "to make money from such common trifling things?"

"Common trifling things, as you call them, Fred, lad, are often the best. In works of art, whether it be a painting or a piece of sculpture, one often does best if he takes what is nearest to hand."

Fred was satisfied now, and somehow or another he went away back to his cottage, broom in hand, thinking about some verses of an old poem he had read once, concerning a sculptor, tired and weary, who sat thinking and grieving in his high-backed chair by the fire. For, to make or fashion a certain statue he had tried in vain every kind of clay and stone. But lo! as he sat there, gazing with the firelight in his face, a bright and happy thought had struck him. He rescued a heat-hardened log from the hearth, and fashioned his work of art from that.

"So," said Fred to himself, "I must not despise little things;" and when he repeated this to Borlem, Borlem replied with unwonted energy:

"Richt, master, richt. Just what my auld midder (mother) used to say: ' **I**lka little helps the mickle.' "



CHAPTER XIII.

A TRUE GHOST ADVENTURE—GIBBIE AND DICK THE POET—"A MOMENTOUS EVENT HAS OCCURRED, MASTER," SAID TIM.

FRED had not forgotten his promise to old Donald, and sure enough Saturday after Saturday found him and his sister Lilly: trudging along the rugged roads that led to the ancient mariner's "shieling," always accompanied by Torlath the collie.

The boy took his Latin lexicon with him, and sometimes even his Latin grammar; for old divines used strange words at times, and translating their writings was not quite as simple as reading Cæsar's wars or Cicero's orations. But Fred was eminently successful, and he wrote out each version on a sheet of ruled paper, in a bold clear hand that quite delighted the old man.

"I shall have all these bound," he told Fred, "and if, my laddie, I am spared for even twenty years to come, I'll never part with them for your dear sake."

While Fred would be working indoors old Donald and Lilly would be going round the premises outside

Not that there was a very great deal to see, only the girl was never tired looking at that bright-eyed goat that had so snug and clean a home. Then there were hens, and ducks, and guinea-fowls, to say nothing of Donald's garden. The patch of ground he occupied was little else save hill-land. Immense great stones or boulders lay here and there on it, and, much to Lilly's surprise, under the shelter of almost every one of these sat a hen hatching eggs.

“Won’t they catch cold?” asked Lilly once.

“No, pussy, no. And here is a hint worth your remembering: always let a hen, or pigeon either, sit where they have a mind to. My fowls chose to get into the little caves made by the boulders, so I let them.”

“But don’t the rats or weasels come sometimes?”

Old Donald laughed.

“Never a rat or weasel comes near my shieling,” he replied, “and goes away alive. My cat is very, very clever. Besides there is a bonnie big red pussy comes round here sometimes—strange to say always accompanied by a little warlock of a gray dog, and I give them a drop of milk.”

“O,” cried Lilly, laughing, “that is Gilbert Bruce and Gael, our dog and cat.”

“Well, well, well, I shall be kinder to them than ever now.”

But Donald and Lilly were always back by the time Fred had finished his version, and tea would be made

and discussed, with nice barley-meal scones and fresh butter, and after this they would gather round the fire to listen to Donald's enchanting stories of his wild young life and adventures by sea and land.

Often and often the night had fallen, and moon or stars were out before they started for home.

The road was dreary enough, and the wind soughing through the pine-trees, or the mournful cry of an owl heard sometimes close overhead, did not tend to make it less dreary.

But they had faithful Torlath with them, and no human being would have attempted to touch them while he was there to be their guard.

Fred still had his old *penchant* for taking short cuts across a field or a bit of heather land, but since that terrible adventure on the Packman Moor he only took these near roads on bright starry or moonlight nights, and he took good care of his feet. Sometimes in crossing such lonesome moorlands they would see great balls of fire, as many as three to five perhaps in a row, rise from the bog-lands, and go sailing like fire-balloons, up into the sky or across towards the pine woods. But the pair were not afraid. They knew these were 'only wills o' the wisp, composed of the inflammable gases that emanate from marshes.

But Fred's custom of taking short cuts led one evening to an adventure that, but for the courage of the boy, might have had a very disagreeable ending.

"I think, Lilly," he said that night, "we might make our way across the Kelpie Moor?"

"Are you sure, dear, that you know the road?" said Lilly, sidling a little more closely up to him as if for protection, for she had no great love for moorlands after darkling.

"O, well enough, Lilly, and it is all a good hard heather bottom; and look at the moon yonder."

True enough there was a moon, or at least half a moon, but the light was every now and then being all but obliterated by dark rain-boding clouds that went sailing by.

Off they went nevertheless down the Kelpie Glen, and across the Kelpie Burn by a wondrous old bridge of loose stones. Through a gloomy bit of pine-wood now, whose darkness caused timid Lilly to creep closer to her brother than ever. Only they soon reached the stone fence, and Fred almost lifted his little sister over.

They had got about half-way across, and the night was just at its darkest owing to a heavier cloud than usual veiling the moon, when suddenly Torlath, who had been a little way ahead, rushed back, but immediately faced round again as soon as he touched his master's leg, and barked most fiercely.

Fred put down his hand to pat him.

What could the dog have seen, or what did he see, for he was trembling and shaking like aspen leaves? There was a half-hysterical kind of sound in his very bark.

Suddenly the moon cut clean out from under the cloud into a rift of blue, and Lilly gave vent to a strange scream like that of a person in a nightmare, and clung tremblingly on her brother's arm.

Standing right in front of them, not twenty yards away, was a tall figure all draped in white, and with a black cap on the head.

Fred too was frightened, and no wonder.

He had never believed in ghosts, but surely that was one.

It seemed moving or gliding towards them too.

"O!" cried poor Lilly, "it is a spirit; it is coming, it is coming, it is——"

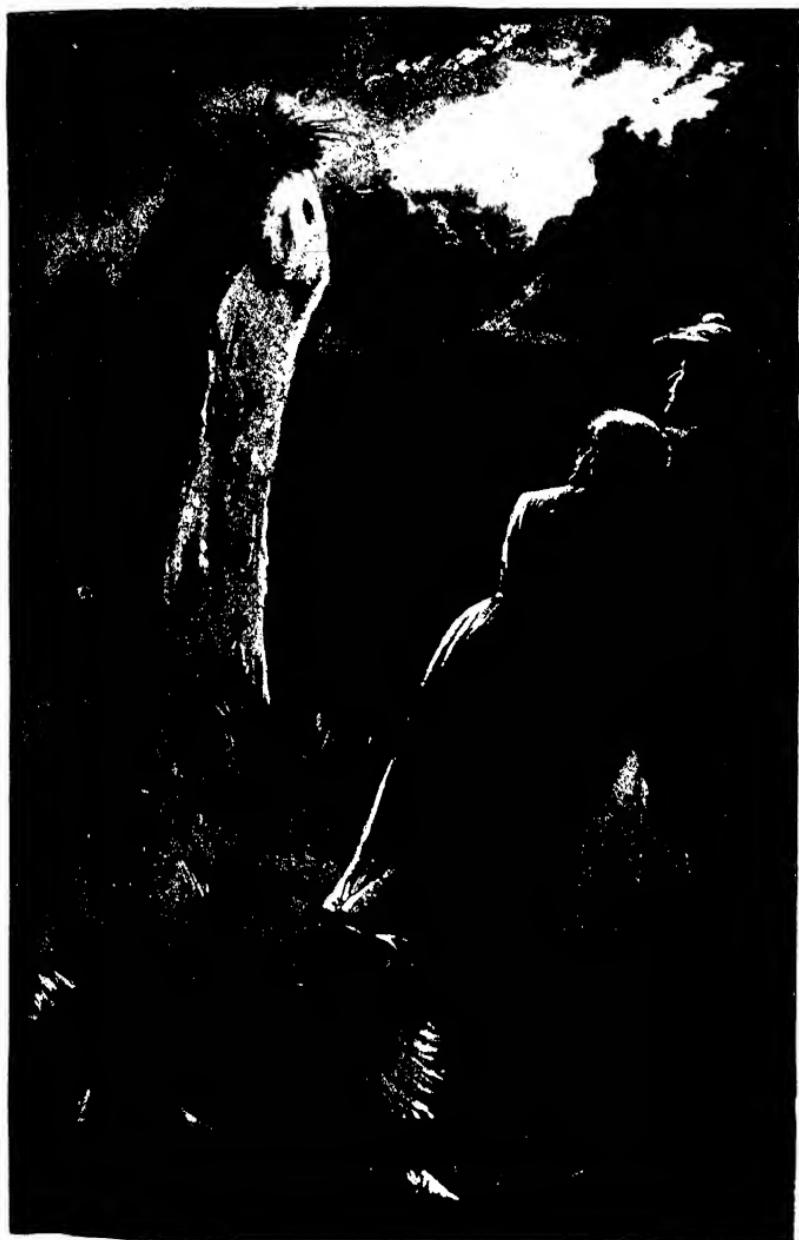
She said no more, but swooned away.

Hardly knowing what he did, or what to do, Fred laid poor Lilly gently down among the heather, then anger took the place of fear.

"Come, Torlath," he cried, "we'll meet this ghost." He had a sturdy stick in his hand, and pointing it in front of him he rushed towards the awful apparition.

He laughed outright when his stick struck a stone. For that is precisely what the ghost turned out to be, a white stone pillar put up for cows to scratch against, and the black cap was a turf that some wag had put on top of it.

Fred filled his Scotch bonnet with water from a pool and ran back now to his sister. He dashed a handful in her face, and presently she shivered a little, sighed, and opened her eyes.



When sensible enough, Fred told her what the ghost was, and soon the two were laughing right heartily at their strange adventure.

But this true ghost story proves one thing at least; namely, that dogs are quite as superstitious in their own way as human beings are.

The corner of Jeannie's stand in the New Market that was to be devoted to our young financier's wares, they dignified by the name of "bazaar." And here, a Friday or two after Borlem and Fred had started broom-making, were displayed not only a dozen of these handy carpet brushes, but many bundles of bird food, and several bouquets of beautiful wild flowers, for spring had come. There were also pretty little bunches of moorland grasses, and a few of the earlier and more common of the fern tribe.

Fred thought he might, on this particular day, put in an appearance himself. He did so for a short time, and several kindly-faced ladies engaged him in talk and drew from him a little of his history.

Fred was making friends. Anyhow he sold all his brooms, and flowers, and grasses as well.

He was hopeful and exultant when he came home that day, the proud possessor of four bright shillings and a sixpenny piece, and this, too, after paying both Jeannie and Borlem for their excellent assistance.

"We can soon have the guinea-pigs now, Lilly," he said that evening.

"O, won't it be delightful!" was the reply.

"Sweet, sweet!" the cock canary ventured to remark.

This was the only bird kept in the house, and a very old and much-beloved favourite. His cage hung on the dining-room wall near the window, and in such a position that it could always catch a blink of sunshine—if there was any—about twelve o'clock. Although birds should never be hung up for any length of time right in the sun, unless part of the cage is protected by an awning, still the sun-bath is very good for all the feathered race, and the "Poet," as he was called, appreciated his very much indeed.

A bright-yellow canary he was, and of most elegant shape and action. His eyes sparkled with intelligence, he was most tame and affectionate, and Lilly, whose bird he really was, used to let him out of his cage once a day regularly, that he might enjoy a fly round the room or a patter across the table or floor.

Gibbie was as often as not lying on the hearth-rug, or sitting singing on the footstool, during the time Dick the Poet was having his hour of exercise, but he had been taught never to touch the bird, and never attempted to do so.

"I'm sure," Gilbert Bruce told his mistress, or seemed to tell her, one day after he had been looking at the Poet affectionately for some time,—"I'm sure, mistress, that Dick would be very nice to eat. Have you ever eaten a canary, Mistress Lilly,—a live canary, feathers and all, you know?"

"No," said Lilly.

"Well, you have no idea how nice it is. No idea!" and Gilbert licked his lips.

Fred, who was seated near, laughed.

"You better not try eating the Poet," he said, "Master Gilbert, else you'll get the sack. Do you know what that means?"

"O, yes," said Gilbert, "I would be presented with a bag and sent out to beg."

"Not quite, Gibbie, lad. We would present you with a bag certainly, but you would be inside it; and instead of being sent out to beg you would be sent down Don. That's all."

"Well," said Gibbie, "I believe, after all, that a sparrow is just as nice as a canary."

Gilbert Bruce, it may be added, did sometimes treat himself to a bird, cruel though it was; but singular to say, he never touched the birds that built low down at hedge-foot or in the bushes that grew around Kildeer. I daresay he looked upon those as private property. But he would climb a high tree and come back with a poor victim. He must have thought that only those birds that built high up were wild ones, and consequently belonged to no one.

Dick was called "the Poet," because the only words—if words they were—he could say bore some fancied resemblance to "sweet, sweet" and "poet, poet." But what a bold and cheerful manner Dick the Poet had! He was always the first to welcome Fred or Lilly

when they came down to breakfast of a morning. And straight away Lilly would go to the cage and see about her pet's seed. Then she took down the water-glass and rinsed it out and gave him a fresh supply. A tiny, tiny, thin bit of bread and fresh butter was the only dainty Dick had of a morning, with the exception of a lump of sugar. Then he would treat Lilly to a song. And when Dick sang he *did* sing. His whole soul was breathed out in that song—right well did he deserve the name of Poet. His notes were clear, ringing notes of joy and love. He would stand with head erect, his body swaying a little from side to side and quivering all over, while his wee throat would swell till the feathers stuck almost straight out. When fairly exhausted he would stop and peep at Lilly with one saucy eye.

"What d'ye think of that?" he seemed to say. "I don't think that the larks would have much chance when I'm about, would they?"

Poor Poet! like many a less ethereal bard, he came to an untimely end. But of this further on.

The little dark rooms which the "mousies" occupied as bed-rooms, were not only kept, like the rest of the cages, sweet and clean, but in one corner was stored a supply of soft, pure, white cotton-wool, which the tiny inmates might use when they wished to make a nest.

Now Fred had somehow got into a habit of moderately-early rising. At all events, he was always up,

had his bath at home, or a roll in the Don, and had fed his father's fowls and pigs before Lilly knew how the wind blew. He never came in without a little fresh green food for Dick the Poet, and a sprig or two of grass in bloom for the pet mice. They used to run to see him, and pretty little gambols they had while he teased them with the bit of grass, pretending to give it, then taking it away again. But they knew they would have it as soon as they had danced themselves into a good appetite.

One morning Fred came in as usual, and after talking to the Poet a minute went to the corner where the mousies were kept, for they had not yet been taken to Fred's cottage. He opened the lid, and the white pink-eyed mouse ran on to his sleeve and sat down. Presently he presented Fred with a wee pink paw. He put it on the boy's little finger's tip. This was called shaking hands. Tim, as he was called, looked exceedingly important this morning, and just a little nervous and fidgety.

To Fred's astonishment the she mousie—the black one—was nowhere to be seen.

"Why, whatever has become of Mrs. Tim?" said Fred.

Tim was sitting up now like a Polar bear, and biting the knuckle of his right foot, as if he had been a human being in deepest contemplation.

"You seem much engrossed, Tim. Where, I ask you, is your good lady?"

"O!" Tim appeared to reply, "haven't you heard the news? But of course you haven't, you're only just up. But I've been up all night, and an anxious time I've had. A very great event has occurred, master—a most momentous event, I might say."

"Nothing wrong, I hope, Tim?"

"O, no!" said Tim, "everything going on as well as could be expected."

And Tim seemed to smile to himself.

"Some fairies came down on a moonbeam last night," added Tim, "and brought—and brought—O! I sha'n't tell you. But just open our bed-room door ever so gently, mind you, because Mrs. Tim is fast asleep."

Fred put his pet back into his courtyard, and then cautiously opened the bed-room lid and peeped in.

Yes. There was Mrs. Tim right enough, and not many inches from her nose the gift the moonbeam fairies had brought—bonnie little baby mice. He could not say how many—six or seven, he thought—but he *knew better than to disturb them*.

He noticed that the mother had given them a dry warm bed of the white cotton-wool, and this was enough.

To say that Fred was pleased would be to give but a poor notion of the state of his feelings. Dear me! it was but a small affair after all, but, nevertheless, the boy was as much elated as if he had hooked and landed a twenty-five pound salmon, and I cannot put it more strongly than that.

Fred stood upon no ceremony to-day in waking Lilly. He usually tapped at her door, but now he went upstairs three steps at a time, and bounced into her room.

"Hurrah, Lill!" he shouted; "wake, lassie, wake! Baby mice have come."

"No!!" said Lill.

"Yes!! Haste you down and see them!"

And away he went.

Of course news of the momentous event spread like wildfire, and innocent Jeannie and Borlem her brother were permitted to have a peep.

"Weel, Freddie," said Jeannie, "ye'll be a rich man afore ye dee (die) faever lives to see it."

Next, Lilly came to the private view, as an artist would say.

"O, Fred, the poor dear little things!" she cried; "they are all naked!"

"Yes, Lilly. Mice, you know, are born hairless, and so are rats; but look at the soft warm bed their mother has made them."

"Might I take up one, Fred, and nurse it a moment in my hand?"

"Lilly!" said Fred, looking serious. "Let me address you in the emphatic language of Duncan and his daughter, 'by Bary.' When I asked Duncan if I might handle the baby mice: 'Doa! doa!' (no! no!) he cried, 'you bustdt touch the you'g bice od ady accoudt. Doa! doa!'

"And 'by Bary' said:

"O, Maister Fred, ye maunna gruffle (ruffle) the wee things, or they'll be completely conacht'" (spoiled).

"Well," said Lilly, "it was exceedingly kind of them to give you such good advice. But when do you think they'll have their clothes on and be able to come down to breakfast?"

"O, in about a fortnight, Lilly."

And sure enough Fred was right, for even a day or two before that time the little things did all come "down to breakfast," as Lilly had put it, and charmingly beautiful they looked.

They were nearly all piebald and well marked, but one was black, with the exception of white stockings on its hind-legs and gauntlets of white on its paws.

The very next night after the birth of this litter, the moonbeam fairies seem to have visited the other cage, so that there really were two momentous events in the self-same week.

On the days the little things came down to breakfast, they were fed on crushed seeds, but they were soon able to eat the ordinary food and be turned into a cage and courtyard all by themselves.

On Friday, however, Fred selected two pairs of the prettiest of these pets, and all the rest, arranged in lovely little cages, were taken to the boy's bazaar in the New Market.

As he had by this time formed what he was pleased

to term a *clientele*, he had not the slightest difficulty in disposing of them at good prices, all the more easily, perhaps, because with each cage he gave away a pretty bouquet of mixed wild-flowers and grasses.

Yes. Fred had a good head for business.





CHAPTER XIV.

THE COMING OF SPRING—DUTY—A LITTLE STRANGER—

“O, FRED!” CRIED LILLY, “HE’S SWALLOWING HIS TONGUE.”

SPRING was coming. Nay, but spring was come. It needed not the welcome notes of the cuckoo, sounding loud over copse or daisied lea, to tell Fred that. A softness had come into the air, a freshness and sweetness o'er all the earth.

Every plant and every creature seemed awakening to joy, to hope, and happiness.

Though the oak trees and the ash and the beech were but throwing out their buds, the pea-green larches with their tassels of crimson were a sight to see. Softer winds were blowing now from south or west. The snow from the hills had all fled away, the Don was no longer swollen and brown, each rippling streamlet was bordered by banks of grass of tenderest green. Rabbits and hares skipped about in the woods, or came out early in the mornings to feed in field corners on the choicest herbage. Birds were pairing or paired. Even the somewhat lazy starlings and dilatory greenfinches

were building their nests; the peewits had all returned, and away on the uplands, on the highest ridges of moorlands or lonely fields, had already scraped their nests and laid their buff, black-speckled eggs; the song of birds was everywhere; every bush seemed to talk and sing; bird music came from the fleecy clouds themselves, from the river's brink, from hill and dell, and even from the centre of the little brown lake where Fred was wont to fish.

The brown earth of ploughed fields was drier now, and here and there dotted over with white sacks of grain, while sturdy men, with sheets aslant their shoulders, walked up and down showering the yellow corn across the hungry ridges. In the gardens flowers were blooming, and every shrub and tree talked about the long summer days that were all before them.

To Lilly and Fred spring-time possessed none of those associations, that seem to link it to sadness in the heart of the poet who sung as follows:—

“The strange sweet days are here again,
The happy, mournful days;
The songs which trembled on our lips
Are half complaint, half praise.

“Swing, robin, on the budded sprays,
And sing your blithest tune;
Help us across these home-sick days
Into the joy of June.”

No, spring to them was a wholly happy time. They had no desire to be helped into the joy of June. They
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were well content to enjoy each day as it came, and to thank Heaven for adding the blessing of health to the glorious gift of youth.

Something new in Nature out of doors was happening now every day.

"O, Lilly!" said Fred one morning, "I've seen some bees out on our cottage garden flowers."

"O, Fred!" said Lilly, "I've seen a bright red butterfly."

"The Crimson Admiral, I suppose," said Fred, looking learned.

In about three weeks' time, dating from the arrival of the peewits, Fred took formal possession of his cottage—that is, he removed his mice there, and set up his work-table near them, and placed his tools all handy, for he had promised himself that he should make quite a host of useful and pretty things with those tools of his.

One Friday he brought home a pair of lovely white rats. They were really good ones, he told Lilly. Duncan had said so. Their parents had won prizes under a good judge at a pet show held in London.

Duncan had briefly described their points and properties to the boy. One was white, the other was piebald.

"These rats," Duncan had said, "would wid a prize adywhere. Look," he added, "at their lo'g tails, their lo'g heads and shapely ears; look at their lo'g bodies and their elegadce all over. By Bary is a fide judge,

and she says they are fide, fide rats. Ab I right or wro'g, Bary?"

Mary, thus appealed to, said her father was right—that the rats were bonnie beasties, and as tame as baby rabbits.

So Fred had bought them, and came home looking as pleased, as if some one had left him a hundred a year.

There is no doubt about it, Fred was getting on in the world.

And somehow everything appeared to prosper with him.

I do not really wonder at this, and I account for the fact in the following way:—Property, as everyone should know, has its duties, even if it be only the possession of pet rats and mice. Fred felt this truth, and he knew the sacred meaning of the word Duty. His father had read the following verses to him once, and Fred never forgot them:—

“Duty! shorn of which the wisest
And the best were little worth,
How with dignity thou risest
O'er the littleness of earth!

“Duty! though one's lot be lowly,
God's broad arrow, thou art seen,
Making even trifles holy,
And exalting what were mean.

“In this thought the poor may revel,
That, obeying Duty's word,
Lowliness is on a level
With my lady or my lord.”

A bright thought struck Fred one morning as he was assisting his convolvulus plants to twine round their own strings, instead of poking out their fingers and feeling for those of their neighbours.

"How quickly these things grow!" he said, "and how nice if they could be cultivated indoors. I'll try."

And so he did. Asking his mother's advice first, and receiving her permission, he placed bunches of the roots of his pet climber, in three or four biggish flower-pots, and placing one under Dick the Poet's cage, arranged the rest in the corners of the room. It was a nice sunny apartment, I may say, else these climbing beauties would not have done so well.

And now let us look ahead a few months, and see what really did happen. Fred then had arranged a series of strings to guide the climbers up the walls, and very soon indeed they began to take advantage of the assistance so afforded, and in June and July they had completely framed every picture in the room with their garlands of leaves and large white flowers. They even encircled the cords that the pictures were hung by.

And as for the Poet's cage, it was a sight to see. Without being so close as to permit Dick to peck at the leaves, the convolvulus had formed around his home a complete arbour of gorgeous green.

The Poet appeared proud of this natural decoration —it was like being in the woods, and Lilly averred,

that he now sung more sweetly and more wildly, than ever he had done in his life before.

As spring merged into summer, Fred's garden increased in beauty, for the flowers in all their fragrance were now opening their petals to woo the sunlight; the cottage front was already almost covered green with convolvulus; the laburnum tree that drooped over the gate was one mass of golden bloom; the rockeries were showing to advantage, and the stone fences that erst were so unsightly, gave now the utmost pleasure to the eye of the beholder.

There was plenty to be done among the shrubs and flowers, however, in order to keep everything neat and tidy. There were weeds to make war upon, the grass to keep tidy and short, the earth to be kept well open and neatly raked, and the gravel walks also needed attention.

But when one does a little every day in a garden, it is wonderful how easily managed it is. If one pulls up the weeds before they grow big and unsightly, the strength of the ground goes to the flowers, and they bloom all the better for it. Again, if flowers and dead leaves are cut away as soon as they begin to show signs of decay, the plant will keep on blossoming much longer.

All who saw them admitted that Fred's borders were extremely pretty. The myosotis or forget-me-not, that had been planted in rows near the edging of bricks, was now a mass of sky-blue bloom, all round the gar-

den, and the pink or crimson silenes next this, with here and there a white flower, made a delightful contrast.

The roses too were already throwing out leaves and even buds of promise.

Then inside the chief room of the cottage itself one could have told at a glance that a lady's fingers had been at work. This is true, for to give Fred a pleasant surprise Mrs. Hallam devoted one whole day—a Friday it was, and the boy was consequently from home—in decorating Lilly's boudoir, as he would persist in calling it. She hung curtains round the windows, neatly draped with bright crimson ribbon. She hung a mirror in one corner and draped that, she placed rugs and mats on the floor, and some great skins on the sofa, and in out-of-the-way corners put up brackets and placed vases of flowers on them, to say nothing of a multiplicity of prettily-knitted bags against the walls that Fred would find handy to place his pens and pencils in.

When the lad entered his room next morning he hardly knew the place, it looked so lovely, yet withal so home-like, that he actually approached his chair almost on tiptoe, and took off his cap as soon as he sat down. Even on his writing-table stood a vase of wild flowers, and flanking his open *Horace*, was a white china jug filled with pure spring water, and a tumbler.

“Ah!” said Fred when he noticed it, “my mother means this as a hint for me to continue my studies.

I do believe the dear mummy thinks that one of these days I may become a minister of the Gospel after all. Well, I—I—I don't feel that I have a call. Why, what is this? A prettily-bound copy of the New Testament in Greek, with the Psalms in English metre. Another thoughtful gift of the mummy. Well, I shall always take this to church with me, and when the parson is reading a chapter in English, I can follow in Greek, and so keep up my classics so far.

After this, for five days of the week Fred spent two hours out of every twenty-four hard at study.

He had come to appreciate the benefits, nay, but the blessings of Regularity—the word is worthy of a capital R. He kept everything in its place, and had a time for everything whether outdoors or in.

When a person has a variety of different duties to occupy his attention during the day, all of which may be classed under the generic term of work, this work may be likened unto one of those wooden puzzles made of pieces of different shapes, which you have to fit up to make complete. If you throw the pieces all in a heap the labour of building your wheel, or whatever it is, becomes rather confusing; but if each piece is marked with a figure, ah! then you build your object in no time. And so with work; regulate the duties that compose it, and everything goes on smoothly and calmly.

At a suggestion of his business-headed father Fred kept not only a note-book but a little ledger or ac-

count-book, and into this Mr. Hallam himself often-times had a peep, and satisfied enough he was that Fred was going on as well as could be desired.

The note-book, I may as well say here at once, he found of the greatest service to him a year or two after this, when he commenced keeping rabbits, pigeons, and poultry. He wrote *all his experiences in it*, and experience really is a blessed teacher. The hand-books on different kinds of stock with which Mr. Hallam's little library was stored were certainly of very great assistance in a general sort of way, but they were not everything, nor did they tell one everything, and a reference to his note-book of a previous year often got Fred out of a difficulty, or prevented him from landing himself in one, which was better still.

In his little ledger, on the other hand, he had a debtor side and a creditor side, and so particular was he to keep things right that, if he gave a penny to a beggar on the street—which, poor though he was, he could not help doing at times—he duly debited his account therewith.

I have all my life had an idea that Providence places pets in the hands of those who really love His creatures, rather than in the possession of people who neither care for nor understand them. The following is an instance, but I could, from my own experience alone, adduce scores.

One Saturday afternoon in the sweet month of May,



Fred and Lilly were starting rather earlier than usual to go to old Donald's, because the boy had rather a long translation to make for the ancient mariner. They had not gone above half a mile, when they noticed Borlem climb over the stone fence from the wood and come towards them.

Borlem had not noticed his young master and mistress at first, but as soon as he saw them he evidently had an attack of the fidgets, and would have run right away back had there been any chance.

Now Borlem, though in some ways a most exemplary lad, had his failings. He was not always proof against the temptation of robbing poor birds' nests, for example, although Fred had over and over again pointed out to him the cruelty of doing so.

He now came slowly, reluctantly on, and it was evident he was carrying something.

"Hello!" cried Fred, stopping right in front of him. "What is this now?"

Borlem looked both guilty and penitent.

"Only a wee birdie, sir," replied Borlem.

Fred could see it was a wee birdie—a young starling, in fact. It had got its first feathers, and a dusty little knot of a thing it looked as it sat all in a bunch in Borlem's hand. It was quite tailless, and its broad, yellow mouth seemed to stretch from eye to eye. A comical creature, indeed, but pitifully innocent looking.

"Now, Borlem, I've a great mind to give you a jolly good thrashing."

Borlem cowered a little. He evidently thought that the very best of thrashings could not be very jolly.

“Where did you get the bird, sir?”

“I dinna ken.”

“But you do know.”

“It flew doon oot o' a tree, sir.”

“Now that's a fib, because the creature is far too young to fly.”

“I found it happing aboot in the wood.”

“No, Borlem, that won't do either.”

“Weel, then, its mither gied it a darb (peck) on the back, and tauld it to gang aboot its bizness.”

“Worse and worse, Borlem.”

“Weel, the auld fadder o't it—”

“Stop, Borlem, stop. *Can't* you tell the truth?”

Borlem begins to drop tears on the back of the dusky starling.

“No, sir,” he whined, “I never learnt. I'm a mitherless bairn. Dinna thrash me, and I'll gie you the birdie to keep.”

There was a kind of pathos in this allusion to his dead mother that touched Fred to the heart. What would he himself be, he thought, if he had no kind mother at home to look after his happiness. The music of the sweet old song came rushing into his mind—

“What is home without a mother?

What are all the joys we meet,

When her loving smile no longer

Greets the coming—coming of our feet?”

So Fred did not thrash the little orphan lad. Lilly now took possession of the bird, and they all returned together to the farm.

They met Gael and Gilbert on their way, just setting out for an evening ramble, and both asked very prettily for the bird, but of course they did not have it.

Lilly took her new pet upstairs to her room and put it in a band-box, spreading some soft crumbs in front of it. Then, having put on the lid and bored a few little holes in it, she ran downstairs and once more rejoined her brother and Torlath.

The dog appeared rejoiced at the turn affairs had taken, for he evidently had thought there would be no walk for him this evening. He did not cease barking for joy, therefore, and running round and round his master and mistress for fully five minutes.

Lilly's first act on her return was to run upstairs, to see if the juvenile starling had picked up his crumbs. Not he. He was sitting in the bottom of the band-box all in a heap as before, and evidently in the brownest of brown studies.

So Lilly went to consult Fred, whom she looked up to on all matters connected with birds and beasts as to an oracle.

"What *shall* we do?" she cried. "The poor wee thing will die if he doesn't eat."

"We must cram him," said Fred, "with a thick paste of pea-flour and milk."

So a little of this was made. Not more than would do for two meals, because if food be not fresh it soon kills a young bird.

In addition to this Borlem was despatched with a lantern and a spade, to dig for some tiny garden worms, and soon returned with a match-box nearly full.

Upstairs now went brother and sister to feed the new arrival.

Lilly held a morsel of paste to his bill. He took not the slightest notice. Then she dangled a little wriggling worm in front of him. But the bird's countenance remained as prim as before. Fred now seized him and opened his bill, while Lilly crammed a piece of paste down his throat.

"Oh, Fred!" she cried in terror, "he's swallowing his tongue!"

Fred laughed aloud. Yet it really did look as though tongue and all went down.

"They always seem to swallow their tongues," said Fred.

After a few more pieces of paste were disposed of, a worm was inserted. For a while the bird would only swallow one half of it, and sat in the bottom of his band-box with the other half sticking out between his yellow lips. Then he made an effort and down the worm went, much to Lilly's relief.

"He'll do now," said Fred, and so they came away and left him



CHAPTER XV.

LILLY TAKES UP SCHOOL—A MAY-DAY ON THE FARM
—FRED'S WORK OF ART—BORLEM AGAIN.

PERHAPS if Lilly had known beforehand the extraordinary task she had undertaken in feeding and rearing that starling, she would have turned him over to the tender mercies of Borlem. She had built a nest for the bird in the band-box, which, singular to say, the starling kept dry and clean. She had taken Gilbert Bruce up to see him too, and given that intelligent puss instructions that he appeared to fully understand. The cat rubbed his great head against Lilly's arm, and really seemed to promise to be friendly with the starling, a promise which, as the sequel will show, he never broke.

But something else was broken, and that was Lilly's rest. For as early as three o'clock, as soon as the stars began to get dimmed by the coming dawn, in fact, that starling was screaming for food, and from that time all day long, and every hour.

He deserted his nest very early in the morning, much preferring to perch on Lilly's head as she lay in

bed. The child really began to look haggard for want of rest. But at long last Willie, as he was called, was able to feed himself. A cage was found for him, and into this he was popped, with a dish of his own and a water fountain all complete.

He lived here all night but not all day. No, for from the very first he was allowed unbounded freedom, and this was the secret of his future cleverness and marvellous wisdom.

"Of course, Fred," said Lilly one day, "he will learn to talk."

"Yes, and whistle tunes too, Lilly. There is no nicer pet in the world than a starling."

"Shall we have to cut his tongue?"

"No, no," cried Fred, "that is the most cruel and useless piece of barbarism towards a bird that anyone can be guilty of."

"Because Sandie M'Byres said he would never talk unless his tongue was cut with a crooked sixpence."

"Sandie M'Byres," said Fred, "is a fool—in some things."

But, readers, in the matter of cutting birds' tongues with the idea of making them better talkers, there are a good many other fools in the world besides Sandie M'Byres.

Lilly Hallam, for one so young, was an exceedingly consequential little miss. She was also a very apt and clever scholar under her mother's tuition, and one

way or another she got through a good deal of reading, and thinking also, in the course of the day.

One morning a bright idea occurred to her, so she walked up to Fred's cottage, the starling as usual perched upon her head. Though by this time the bird could fly well enough, he much preferred to ride.

"Come in, Lilly," said Fred kindly. "Sit down there till I finish this problem and then I'll talk."

"Now," he said at last, "what have you come for? A flower?"

"No, Fred, I've been thinking."

"Thinking what?"

"Thinking that it is a pity poor Borlem knows so little, and can only read with difficulty."

"Well, silly Lilly?"

"And as I have got one pupil—Willie, the starling here—already, it would not be much more trouble to teach two."

Fred laughed.

"It is a droll idea," he said, "Borlem and the starling both in the same class at school. But"—noticing that his sister's face fell—"it isn't a bad one, little sister, so try. There can be no harm in trying."

So Lilly took up school for an hour and a half each day, and really I am not prepared to say which of her pupils made the greater progress—Borlem or the starling.

Borlem was a queer boy one way or another. For example, he was pretty well acquainted with his New

Testament and the Psalms in metre—for all Scotch boys love verse—but he knew absolutely nothing of Bible history.

As to the starling, he had already learned to say: “Willie, Willie, Willie,” and “Poor Willie!” with a long-drawn melancholy emphasis on the adjective “Poor.” And the worst of it was he would often speak when no one wanted him to. Here is just one little example of how teaching went on in Fred’s workshop at the cottage.

Lilly. “Now, Borlem, who was the first man?”

The Starling. “Poor Willie!”

Lilly. “Hold your tongue, Will. Who was the first man, Borlem?”

Borlem (in an off-hand way). “Cain, of coorse.”

Lilly. “You wicked boy!”

Borlem. “Weel, Abel then. O, no; I mind noo, it was Adam, Miss Lilly.”

Lilly. “You’re a good boy.”

The good boy looks proud and pleased.

Lilly. “Now, Borlem, what are you made of?”

Borlem. “O, I can answer that finely.”

Lilly. “Well, what are you made of?”

Borlem (decidedly). “Dust and rushes.”

Lilly. “You silly child! I’ve told you over and over again. Dust and ashes.”

Borlem. “O, ay, to be sure. What a feel (fool) I am! I micht hae kent (known) the Good Man wouldna make a body out of dust and rushes.”

The Starling. "Willie, Willie, Willie. Poo—oor Willie!"

And so the teaching went on; but for all its humour and strangeness, Lilly really succeeded in a few months in making Borlem quite an apt scholar.

"You never know what you can do till you try, Lilly," her mother told her, "and it is better to be doing a little good than spending one's days in idleness."

But idleness was really a thing unknown on the farm of Kildeer.

In this same month of May the farm might have been described as being in full swing. Indeed, I do not exaggerate when I say, that although there were scores of nice farms all round the country side, one would have had to walk a good long way before he found one at which the work went more merrily or more happily on than at Kildeer.

Mr. Hallam had been a sailor officer, it is true, but I do not think that this militated in the slightest degree against his being a fairly good farmer. In his intercourse with his servants he was probably somewhat brusque in giving his orders, as one is apt to be who for many years has been in the habit of talking to blue-jackets or marines.

But from Sandie M'Byres, the grieve, downwards to Borlem himself all liked and respected "master."

Nor was the master ashamed to put his shoulder to the wheel himself. Indeed, from early morning till six in the evening, with the exception of meal times

he was seldom without a farming implement of some sort in his hand.

Take a day in May for example, and we find everybody busy in a field thinning young turnips. To see and listen to them, one would have thought it was play and not work they were engaged at. Fred is here, hoe in hand, as well as his father, and Borlem, and Buttons, and Joe, the orra man; and even Jeannie herself has been spared from the house work, for the weather is fine and the work is urgent. They have a drill each, and manage to keep pretty nearly abreast or in line. Tongues wag as quickly as do the hoes. Conversation is for a time general, though desultory. Then somehow or other the last Sabbath's sermon comes up for review, and this gives Sandie an opportunity to give quite a theological lecture—this is his strong point—with, curiously enough, quotations from Burns and Ossian thrown in here and there.

But Mr. Hallam gets tired of this, throws Sandie off unceremoniously and at a tangent, and commences a story of adventure on the coast of Africa, to which everybody, especially Borlem, listens with silent attention.

This done: "Give's a song, Jeannie," cries Sandie; and without much pressing, in a sweet simple bird-like voice, and to a bonnie old air, Jeannie sings the "Nameless Lassie."

"There's nane may ever guess or trow
My bonnie lassie's name,
There's nane may ken the humble cot
My lassie ca's her hame.

“ Yet tho’ my lassie’s nameless,
An’ her kin o’ low degree,
Her heart is warm, her thoughts are pure,
An’ O, she’s dear to me.”

Yes, and innocent Jeannie is herself a nameless lassie, and humble enough in all conscience. But, who knows, even Jeannie may have a name one of these days and become a braw gudewife.

While the hoeing goes merrily on, Torlath is lying in the sunshine at the top of a drill snapping at flies, Sandie’s heron is standing near him on one leg, asleep as usual; but Gael is busy, busy at the hedgerow near the wood, and thinks he’ll find a rat.

By and by a bell rings at the farm, and instantly hoes are dropped, and all hurry home for dinner and a good hour’s rest.

One day while walking homewards from The Hall, where he had been visiting his friend Captain Rowland, another new idea struck Fred. New ideas were quite in this boy’s way.

He had his butterfly-net this afternoon, and a box in which to place his specimens after squeezing each on the thorax to kill it—no cruelty in this, neither moths nor butterflies suffer pain. He had been successful in getting quite a number of beautiful ones.

How pretty, he thought, they would look set up on a small rustic tree under a glass shade.

He kept thinking about this all the way home, and

even in bed that night, and the very next day he proceeded to put his idea into solid form.

First and foremost he went to an old carpenter, or rather millwright, who lived in the village not far off. This kindly tradesman was, like Fred, very fond of animals, and he was very fond of Fred and Lilly also, used to make teetotums for them when they were quite little things, and if at any time Fred wanted the loan of a tool, he had only to go and ask for it. Well, the boy got his friend to fashion for him a piece of round wood about a foot in diameter with a hole right in the centre, and one inch and a half thick.

"Is it a pot-lid you're going to make?" asked the man.

"Not quite," said Fred, laughing. "It is something very artistic. You may see it when it is finished."

The millwright did not take long to make the article from a piece of deal, and home walked Fred, brimful of his happy idea.

Now a knife and a pot of glue was all that was wanted in the way of assistance, and Fred had both. He next went off to the woods and brought home several branches of the larch tree, the bark of which is both smooth and pretty, the lad's object being to cover the whole of the round wooden butterfly-stand with twiglets of larch, after the fashion we see window-boxes made sometimes. He commenced at first by cutting eight pieces of branch, each nearly six inches long and about half an inch wide, and flattened them with his knife

on what would be the under surface. Having done so, he warmed his glue-pot and arranged these bark-covered bits of branches on his stand star-fashion, radiating from the centre-hole to the edge. Of course they were equidistant. Then between these star-rays he set about fastening on, crossways, twiglets of larch no thicker than a penholder, close together, so as not to show a morsel of the white wood. What with having to cut each twig to the proper length and glue each on singly, this was quite a long though not laborious piece of workmanship. But it was finished at last, and now only the side, or thickness, of the wheel-like stand remained to be covered with twigs. These were here arranged vertically, of course. When this was done the whole was finished, and Fred, having taken the trouble to count, found that he had glued on no less than 426 twiglets on this butterfly-stand. But after all, the stand was not complete, so Fred got the top of a tiny spruce fir, and therefrom he fashioned what looked like a very small Christmas tree, only the branches were more regular, and of course shorter and shorter towards the top. This tree—it was about fifteen inches high—was now fitted into the centre hole of the twig-covered foot, and lo! the work was done, and a most beautiful and rustic article it looked. Before, however, it could be dressed with butterflies and moths it needed a large glass shade.

This would cost money. Well, Fred had money now, thanks to his bazaar in the New Market. So on

the very next Friday he visited Duncan's shop as usual, and he very kindly recommended to a place where he could buy a clear glass shade very cheaply.

"Bention by nabe," he called after Fred as he was hurrying away out of the shop, "and you wod't have to pay so buch boney."

But Fred bought something else in town as well as the glass shade, namely, a bewitching assortment of small artificial leaves and flowers, and a few dyed grasses.

When, next day, these were artistically arranged on the tree, fastened with tiny pins and points cut off big pins, with sprays left to trail over the rustic foot, Fred put on the shade. Why, it was already fit to be an ornament for a sideboard!

It took the lad a whole week of butterfly-hunting, moth-catching, and beetle-gathering to get enough to stock his case. The creatures had to be set, too, on cards and boards in the forms he wished them to assume, either with closed or open wings, and some of the bigger moths had to be opened beneath, the entrails taken out with a curved needle, a little preserving paste inserted, and then a tiny morsel of cotton wadding.

He was successful in getting a very nice collection, and to make this work of art all the more valuable he added several rare and beautiful specimens from a case he had.

It took him one whole day to arrange the specimens

on the tree, on the artificial flowers, and all over the foot. Some of the smaller and prettier coloured beetles he gummed on the green leaves. This looked very natural. But indeed so did the whole beautiful case.

Fred's mother admired it very much. Jeannie turned eyes and hands heavenwards, and said "My conscience!" three several times. And even Torlath, the collie, expressed his pleasure by backing away from it and barking. Fred felt as pleased as a suckling author with his first book.

But better luck was to follow, for Captain Rowland walked over one afternoon to see the cottage, and Miss Venner accompanied him. They were both much struck with the simple but almost æsthetic arrangement of the butterfly stand. Miss Venner especially admired it, and finally the gallant captain bought it, and our hero—it is the first time I have called him our hero, but surely he deserves the title now—our hero found himself the proud possessor of three sovereigns.

Now it happened that at the time this lady and gentleman paid a visit to Fred's cottage, Lilly was in the workshop or school-room, as she now called it, teaching the young idea how to shoot—said young idea being Borlem. The starling was in his cage in the corner, for he usually retired during school hours.

While seated in the other room, and during a pause in the conversation, Lilly was heard distinctly enough

saying: "You naughty boy, if you don't do your sums more correctly, I shall have to keep a cane and warm your fingers well."

"What is your sister doing?" asked Miss Venner in some surprise.

"Teaching Borlem, our herd-boy, to read and write."

"How interesting! May we go in?"

"With pleasure," said Fred, jumping up and leading the way.

Lilly coloured a little when Miss Venner and the captain walked into the room, and the starling said "Poo—oor Willie!" But their kindly and natural manners soon made the child-teacher feel perfectly at her ease.

There was no additional shyness about Borlem, however.

"May I ask your pupil a few questions, Lilly?"

"Certainly, Miss Venner."

"What sums are you doing, little boy?"

"I'm in compound proportion, miss; but I'll soon be clean oot o' proportion and into fractions."

"And what else do you know?"

"I can vreete——"

"Say 'I can write,' Borlem," said Lilly, interrupting him.

"I can write, miss," said Borlem, "and I ken some geography."

"Well done! And your catechism?"

"O, I ken the maist o' the catachiss. She keeps me

hard at that. I'm through Effectual Calling and past Redemption, miss."

Miss Venner smiled, the captain laughed aloud, the starling said "Willie, Willie, Willie!"

"Now, my dear lad, can you read a little for me?"

Lilly handed Borlem a well-thumbed school Bible.

"What'll it be?" he said, addressing his little mistress. "David and Goliath, or Joseph and his brethren?"

A portion of this last beautiful Scripture story was chosen, and Borlem's reading really did credit to his teacher.

"Ask him a few questions on Bible history, Miss Lilly."

"He is so fond of big words," said Lilly.

"Borlem," she continued, "who was Maher-shal-al-hash-baz?"

Borlem scratched his head.

"Maher-shal-al-hash-baz," he repeated. "Funny, noo, I've a kind o' forgotten. I think the bonnie lady has bewitched me. Maher-shal— O, he was a king or a prince, or a prophet, or something in that line."

"Who was Methuselah?"

"The auldest man that ever lived, boo'd and decrepit."

"Stop, stop!"

"Weel," said Borlem, "Granny Gray is a' that, and she's only ninety-five."

"Who were Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego?"

"I canna get my tongue roon a' that."

"Try," said Captain Rowland.

"Shadrach, Meshach, and *to bed you go*," said Borlem, and it is needless to say that the examination stopped here. But I should add that it was out of no disrespect either to the company or to things sacred that Borlem talked thus flippantly. Really at heart the boy was good, and had all a Scotch lad's reverence for the Book of Books.

The portion of the New Testament that Borlem was most fond of was the Revelation. Around this book hung a sort of enchantment for the lad, and he was never tired of perusing it.

Miss Venner took an opportunity when no one saw her of slipping a shilling piece into Borlem's hand. And at that moment Borlem felt that he could willingly have done anything in the world for Miss Venner, and he made a vow that he should send her the very first string of mountain trout that he was able to draw to bank.





CHAPTER XVI.

A SUMMER'S RAMBLE O'ER MOUNTAIN, MOOR, AND FELL
—FRED AS A NATURALIST.

TO-MORROW, then," said Captain Rowland, "we meet at the old castle of B——."

"To-morrow, sir," said Fred as he lifted his cap at his own little gate.

For summer had now commenced in earnest. Not that the weather was hot, it was simply warm, balmy, and delicious. Every tree was clad in a wealth of foliage, the woods were cloudlands of green, the brown hills, speckled white with rocks and stones, stood clear out against fleecy clouds that were banked along the horizon; but high overhead the sun sailed free in an ocean of blue. The fields and leas were green and daisied; the tender corn was almost hiding the brown earth; everywhere by bank and stream and hedgerow there was a flush of wild flowers; everywhere was the perfume of flowers; everywhere were bird and bee and butterfly.

Of course Lilly was to accompany her brother, and as a special treat Gael was to come too, and Torlath

for once in a way was to stay at home and guard the farm.

Was it any wonder that on so lovely a day, with a heart so light, and with prospects immeasurably brightened since he had become possessed of those three sovereigns earned by his own industry, Fred should imitate the birds and burst into song as he and Lilly trudged along to the old castle ruin, where they were to meet their friends?

Donside, as the districts along the banks of the grand old river are generally named, is romantic and beautiful from its very source to Auld Brig o' Balgownie near the sea. It is this bridge with its one arch and its deep black salmon stream below that the poet Byron mentions in one of the cantos of *Don Juan*.

“As Auld Lang Syne brings Scotland one and all,
Scotch plaids, Scotch snoods, the blue hills and clear streams,
The Dee, the Don, Balgownie’s Brig’s black wall,
All my boy feelings, all my gentler dreams
Of what I then dreamt, clothed in their own pall,
Like Banquo’s offspring—floating past me seems
My childhood in this childishness of mine:
I care not:—’tis a glimpse of Auld Lang Syne.”

Yes, Donside is very romantic and very historical, associated, too, with the days of Bruce and Wallace. Many a ruined castle here lies bare to the moon, and round them many entralling romances might be woven; but few excel in quaint beauty, or in interest, the ruins of Castle B—.

Lilly and Fred were here first, so they had time to

look around them. This strange old place, although no portion of it was inhabited, was not entirely a ruin, for one wing might have made a delightful country mansion.

But its principal halls, where chieftains had feasted in the brave days of old, were now carpeted with long green grass, like that which floats over graves; while dwarf birch bushes and golden-tasselled broom grew on the top of the broad and lofty walls. Some of the little turret chambers had been taken possession of by wild pigeons, others by noisy jackdaws, and even strange-faced owls built somewhere about the castle. Down in the donjon keep, beneath the level of the ground, the rats and the bats had it all their own way. Sometimes, while passing here on a moonlit night, Fred had noticed a long-bearded goat, standing out weirdly against the sky on the loftiest corner of the ancient tower.

In this old place were kitchen chambers, with fire-places in them big enough to have roasted an ox in. There were, too, narrow mouldering stone staircases which went winding away up, up, up, so high at last that it made one quite giddy to look down on the tops of the trees, the flighty rooks, and the winding stream that lay close beneath the walls.

Fred was high up among the ivy, hanging on like a veritable bat, while he gazed into a green-finches nest, when Captain Rowland and Miss Venner entered the hall.

As for Gael, at that moment he was down in the donjon keep, where he had already killed two monster rats. Presently he appeared and laid one beside Lilly and Miss Venner, who were sitting together on the grass. Then he ran back and brought the other.

Captain Rowland patted him, but Gael showed his teeth.

"I allow no familiarities," he seemed to say.

When they had sufficiently admired the old ruin, they started off on their bird-nesting ramble.

Fred had it all arranged beforehand. There were no nests to look for—though now and then they came across a fresh one.

He took them through a meadow first, warning them to walk silently. He pointed towards a cloud against which a lark was singing, dimly seen. And ever and anon, as the birdie sang, he turned first one side of his head and then the other earthwards, to see if his little mate still sat snug on her nest and was listening.

But as soon as he saw human beings approaching his home he came singing downwards, finally, with a long-drawn note, alighting at some distance from the nest.

"He does that," said Fred, "to deceive us."

And this was true, for next minute the she-bird flew from its nest at their very feet.

"Isn't it lovely?" said the boy delightedly.

And Miss Venner admitted it was, — built of dry

grass, so regularly, so evenly, and containing five dark-brown eggs. Fred lifted one up, and laid it gently in the lady's palm. It felt as hot almost as fire. Then he put it just as gently back in the same position.

In a bush near the corner of this field a robin had built its nest. They do build in such queer places, anywhere in fact. The inside of a garden roller, an old tea-pot, an old tree, a mossy bank, or under the pulpit stairs, haphazard, for the bird has wonderful confidence in man. Well, the eggs—whitish with dirty yellow speckles at one end—were not interesting, though the hair-lined nest was pretty; but in this nest was a reddish-gray egg, a size or two larger than robin's.

"What is that big egg?" asked Miss Venner.

"The cuckoo's egg," said Fred.

Cock-robin, not two yards away, felt it incumbent upon him just then to burst into song. He seemed to know that his nest would not be molested.

Not far from this field they came to a bit of deserted ground, mostly covered with broom and furze. Fred held up a finger to enjoin silence, and the party followed him on tiptoe. He pointed to a cosy corner, half-hidden by a bush, and there sat a lovely pheasant. Fred, much to Miss Venner's astonishment, stooped down and gently smoothed the bird, then he placed near her a handful of oats, and came silently away.

"She knows me," was all he said.

They visited a partridge's nest next in a corner of

the field. There were but few eggs in it, nearly as big as pigeons', but more pointed, and of a dusky yellow-brown.

"She lays from a dozen to twenty eggs," said the young naturalist, "and I have known her remove them all with her claws to a place of safety."

Fred showed them the nest of the corn-crake. The eggs, to the number of five, were reddish and very pretty, while the nest was well concealed in a field of hay.

"Gilbert Bruce brought home a corn-crake alive once," said Fred, "and, of course, father let it off. It is a ventriloquist, and sends its voice to the part of the field it wants you to go to."

"Away from its nest?"

"Yes, away from its nest. It could deceive me easily, but it had not been clever enough to make much of a fool of Gilbert Bruce."

"Does Gilbert bring many creatures home?" asked Miss Venner.

"Everything that he is proud of. Any rare bird that he catches, and this is always brought living with never a tooth in it. But anything in fur is killed. He brought home a pole-cat or foumart once, and sometimes he brings a trout."

"Does he fish?" said the lady in some surprise.

"Yes, Miss Venner, constantly."

They were now close to the romantic little Kelpie burn, and near a strange old, but small, bridge. There

on a stone in midstream stood a lovely specimen of the Dipper or Water Ousel. Fred took Miss Venner by the hand and guided her down the bank, and made her stoop down under the bridge, and lo! there was the ousel's nest of moss and grass with five lovely white eggs. The bird sang unconcernedly. Its voice was sweet though the song was short.

"It is no bigger than a thrush, Fred," said Miss Venner; "and what a lovely black, brown, and white breast!"

"No wonder it's breast is white; it is constantly in the water and under the water. No, Miss Venner, the feet are not webbed. It isn't a duck," said Fred, smiling.

"I'm *so* ignorant, but I do like to be told."

"Cheep, cheep, cheep!" sang a bird not far off.

"What is it, Fred; I see nothing?"

"Nor I; but it is a pied Watery Wagtail, and his nest is close at hand."

"So it was, in a bank, though this bird builds in strange places sometimes."

The eggs were six, longish, light gray, and brown ticked. "They are very hot, and one is chipped," said Fred. "The young will soon be out."

"We're coming now to a nest at the foot of a hedge," said the boy, "the eggs in which are, I think, very pretty, white, and strangely striped and speckled as if by a pen or pens dipped in red, gray, and brown ink. It is the Skite's or Yellow Hammer's. Yonder is the

cock. Hear his sweet wee song with its last long-drawn note."

"Chick—chick—chick—chick—chee—ee—ee!"

"You see how bright and yellow his plumage is, and yet the boys stone and persecute him."

"O!" he added, holding the grass and weeds aside, "the birds are all out."

And, sure enough, nothing was to be seen but a nest full of very wide yellow gaping mouths.

Out came Fred's bait-box. It was full of garden worms, and he broke up two and placed the pieces in the little greedy mouths.

"They take me for their father," he said. Then he stooped down and held up half an empty egg-shell on the point of his finger as if it had been a thimble.

"How lovely the colours!" said the lady.

"Yes," said Fred, "and I've known the cuckoo lay in the Yellow Hammer's nest."

He showed them several other nests in the fields. Then the whole party, with Gael at their heels, passed into the long range of tree-land called the Kelpie Woods.

"There is a deal to see here," said the boy. "I hardly know what to show you first."

"*Chicker, chickier, chickier.*"

"There goes old Mother Magpie. Shall I get up the tree and bring down an egg?"

Hardly waiting for a reply he swarmed up the trunk of the giant larch, then struggled through the branches,

and was just as quickly back again with an egg larger than a blackbird's but not unlike it.

"Chicker, chicker, chicker!" complained the magpie.

"Don't worry, old lady," cried Fred, "I'll put it back in a minute."

"Why, you are never going——"

"O, but I am," said Fred, and up he went with the egg.

"Is it because the bird is unlucky that you replace the egg?"

"O, no! but I'm no egg-collector. I think it very cruel.

"Besides, he added, "that egg was no use to me, but of great value to the silly old pie."

He came to an exceedingly tall Scotch pine now, and on the top thereof was a huge nest of sticks.

"Hullo!" he said, "this is something fresh. A hoody, I think." He kicked the tree, and away flew a kestrel hawk.

"O!" he continued, "here is an egg you must see."

And in a few minutes Fred was in the sky, on the very summit of the swaying pine. He could see far away over the woods, and over all the wild and beautiful country.

Both hawks flew close past and tried to peck him, but he held them off while he placed the lovely red-and-black speckled egg in his bonnet. This he took in his teeth, and soon got safe to ground. When the egg was sufficiently admired he took it up again.

His brow was bleeding when he returned, and he had to dab it with his handkerchief.

"You've scratched your brow with a branch," said Miss Venner anxiously.

Fred smiled. "No," he said, "Mamma Kestrel did that with her wing or bill, I don't know which, but it doesn't signify.

They now came to a low thicket of spruce, which positively seemed all alive with the song of birds, and if there were any intervals at all, they were filled up with the melancholy crooning of the cushat, which Miss Venner at first mistook for the voice of some one moaning in pain.

Here were many nests. The wood pigeon's: a flat arrangement of sticks and heather, with two white eggs. That the mavis or song thrush: a clay-lined nest with green-blue black spotted eggs. The blackbird's lined with grass; and in a cosy corner of the branch of a dwarf and lichen-clad larch, the big round mossy nest of a little Jenny Wren. Jenny herself, wee, and pert, and brown, went hopping and chirping about quite close at hand.

Fred forked out from the hole in the side such a wee wee white red-spotted egg.

"There are nearly a dozen of those," said Fred.

"Isn't the Jenny Wren the Robin's wife?"

"O no, Miss Venner; that is a popular fallacy. Robin has a wife with a red breast, and very much like himself."

On they went, and the wood becoming more open they came to a beech-tree.

There sounded therefrom a bright high lilt of a song, which very much resembled the following words, spoken very quickly:

“Sweet—sweet—sweet, come and kiss me, dear!”

It was the lovely chaffinch, one of the best-adorned of our woodland songsters. And his nest is quite a work of art, the lichens on the outside arranged in a way no human hands could imitate. And the eggs are pictures—once seen never forgotten.

“Chaffie,” said Fred, “is such a good father! As soon as the young are able to run he takes them out walks every day and gathers food for them, and shows them all the curiosities of the forest.”

“Sweet—sweet—sweet, come and kiss me, dear!” sang the bird from the topmost bough.

“Do you see that nest on this high Scotch pine?”

“Yes; is it a hawk’s?”

“No; it is a hoody’s—that crow with the gray back, you know, that sometimes steals the chickens. He is a solitary bird, and does not build in a rookery. There comes the female with a bit of dead mouse in her bill. I need not go up; the young are out.”

There were many more strange nests to be seen in the woods, that I have no space to describe, and soon they got clear of the trees and found themselves in a lonesome heathery moorland.

“I own a lot of stones here,” said Fred.

"Stones?" repeated Miss Venner.

"Yes; I place flat stones down here and there, and after a week I turn them up and find many very strange and beautiful beetles and things under them. Here is one."

He turned over a piece of rock as he spoke and knelt beside it in rapture.

To a naturalist there certainly was a deal to admire under that stone; but Miss Venner was not partial to creepie-creepies, so Fred carefully—almost piously—replaced the roof of the abode of the beetles and led the way across the moor.

Whirr! quaick, quaick, quaick! from near a rush-girt pool, and the boy soon had the pleasure of showing his friends a wild-duck's nest. There were twelve smooth green-white eggs in it. Not a very artistic nest, but nicely lined with feathers and down.

"They don't always build beside the water. I had a nest, Miss Venner, in the stump of a tree last year, and the young birds fell down and some were killed."

"Do you think a wild-duck is a wise bird?"

"A wild-duck is, I think," said Fred; "but," he added, "there are fools among birds just the same as among human folks."

He took them next to see a moor-hen's nest, and also a coot's. The latter was built in a rush-bush, and quite in the pond, so that it was with some difficulty Fred managed to get out one of the lovely pointed

eggs, the background of a greenish-gray, and all the egg speckled and splashed with brown.

The nest of the moor-hen was on the borders of another pool of dark-brown water, a big, flag-built, irregular house it was, though neatly lined with grass, with six red-white eggs prettily speckled with rufous-brown.

The hen was not at home. Yonder she was, afloat in the water and earnestly eyeing the strangers, while on a hillock not far off stood the male bird, so near that Miss Venner got a very nice view of him.

"O what a lovely wild-looking thing!" she exclaimed; "and look! his duck-like bill is nearly all crimson, his legs are green, and he has bright-red garters above them; but no web-feet. How very interesting!"

They saw some teal-ducks, but could find no nest, and these were even more lovely than, though not quite so interesting as, the moor-hen.

This moorland might have been said to be at the present time in all its summer glory. In autumn it would be crimson and purple with blooming heath and heather; but now the patches of yellow furze, that lay low on the ground and scented the air for yards and yards around, were a sight to see. Among these "whins," as we call them in Scotland, Fred found a yellow-hammer's nest, and also a nest of the rose-linnet. The cock linnet sang sweetly on a spray of furze not far off; and his nest, with white and red speckled eggs, was artfully concealed in a bush near by.

But the day was getting on, so they crossed the moorland and began to climb a hill, a hill that would have been called a mountain by an Englishman.

"Hark!" said Miss Venner shortly after they had begun the ascent; "what bird is that?"

It was indeed a strange sound, and seemed doubly strange because up here, save for the occasional voices of the wild birds or the bleating of lambs, all was silent as the snow-lands of Greenland. The cry of this bird was partly whistle and partly shriek, a cry that if once heard is never, never forgotten. The first three or four notes are prolonged and mournful, the rest get rapid and more rapid till they end in one long quavering scream.

"Whew—w—eet, wheew—w—ect, wheew—w—hect, hoo—eet, hoo—eet, hooeet, hoo, whew-whew-whew-whew—w—w."

There it is on paper.

"That is the whaup," said Fred.

"The curlew," explained Captain Rowland. "Don't you remember the lines in Walter Scott's "Lady of the Lake?" It is Roderick Dhu who is talking to Fitz-James, whom he is so soon to fight.

"'Have then thy wish. He whistled shrill,
And he was answered from the hill.
Wild as the scream of the curlew,
From crag to crag the signal flew.
Instant, through copse and heath, arose
Bonnets and spears and bended bows.'"

"That is very warlike and spirited," said Miss Venner, smiling; "but I should address that bird in different language."

"How, then?"

"I should quote Hogg and say—

“Bird of the wilderness,
Blythesome and cumberless,
Sweet be thy matin o'er moorland and lea!
Emblem of happiness, blest is thy dwelling-place—
O to abide in the desert with thee!””

"And do you think the curlew the emblem of happiness, Fred, my boy?" said the captain.

"It is a *very* happy bird," said Fred, "and I know of a nest."

"O, let us see it!" exclaimed Miss Venner. "I shall dream of this day in the wilds, and of that bird in particular."

Fred now led his party a little to one side and across a dry grass moor, where lizards ran, and where here and there a splendid snake lay coiled up on a bank, his skin glittering in the sunshine as if he had been newly varnished. Not much of a nest was it; only some leaves, bits of grass and heather; but in it were four pretty eggs about as large as those of the lapwing, but more pear-shaped, lightish green, and all spotted over with darker green and chocolate.

They are usually placed prettily in the nest with the pointed ends inwards, but in this case they lay anyhow. Probably in her hasty flight the mother had

disarranged them. She sat on a mound not far off, so that Miss Venner had a very nice view of her.

"A droll, wild thing!" was her verdict, "with those long legs and that very long curved bill."

On the very summit of the hill was found the nest of a ptarmigan, the wildest grouse in Scotland, and the largest reddish-brown eggs, all blotched and speckled with chocolate, were declared by Miss Venner to be the loveliest she had yet seen.

One egg was very peculiar. It had a mark on it as if part of the colour had been wiped off with a finger. Singular to say, too, this egg had been turned out of the nest; so Fred blew it and presented it to Miss Venner as a souvenir of the day's ramble.

On the hill-top Captain Rowland took off the fishing-basket he carried and produced therefrom a luncheon that would have pleased a prince.

And of this Gael came in for a hearty share. He had been very good, the only thing he had killed, being a grass-snake and the two rats in the donjon keep of the old castle ruin. .



CHAPTER XVII.

RATS A FINANCIAL FAILURE—A “CIRCUS” OF TAME
MICE—A WONDERFUL STARLING—BELLACK, A PET
COW—BUILDING A “CAVIARY.”

TOWARDS the end of the summer, as Fred's mice, thanks to Lilly's careful feeding and cleanly management, continued to thrive, and as, thanks to his bazaar on Jeannie's stand, and to the liberality of his friend Captain Rowland, he found himself possessed of plenty of money, he determined to take a step in advance and go in more largely for rats.

He first consulted Duncan, however.

“They dod't pay so well as bice,” said Duncan frankly. “By Bary cad tell you thiat.”

Mary, thus appealed to, said:

“No, Fred, they don't pay so well. You see, they breed awfu' fast, an' ye canna aye sell them. They're bonnie pets, and as clean as a new saxpence; but few grown-up folks care for them, and they're no laddies' pets as a rule. Gie a laddie a mousie and he's at hame, but he cares less for a white rat.”

“Well, anyhow,” said Fred, who was perhaps a little headstrong, “I'll have another pair for love.”

"Well, my friedt," said Duncan, "love is ode thi'g and boney is adother."

So that Friday Fred went home rejoicing with his second pair of lovely crimson-eyed white rats. They were exceedingly tame, having been handled since they were young; indeed, for a time, till the novelty wore off in some measure, Fred was hardly ever seen without a rat on his shoulder.

His rats were kept in a cage similar in some respects to that of the mice, only larger, and they had sweet dry hay or shavings for a bed in the dark room. On the cage was also a tall tower with a winding staircase, up which the rats used to chase each other and have glorious fun.

Sometimes, when Fred and Lilly were having supper together, the cage would be placed on the table and the door opened. And the great fun was this: these beautiful pets thought it very clever to steal. They would pick up and hurry off to their den with anything they could carry—an apple, a potato, a piece of bread or cheese, or even an egg. They also stole silver tea-spoons and Lilly's thimble. Indeed, whenever the girl missed this she knew where to find it.

One day Mrs. Hallam missed her gold ring, which she had placed on the wash-stand in her bed-room. The floor—every corner of it—was searched in vain, and even part of the carpet and the furniture lifted, but without result.

But when Lilly next day opened the door of the

rat's bed-room to look for her thimble she found also her mother's ring. This was all the more strange because Fred's pets had never been known to visit Mrs. Hallam's room. It was simply a case, therefore, of daring burglary by a rat.

Our hero soon found out that his rat pets were not at all dainty as to food. However, he gave them no cheese or any oily diet.

They bred well, and there were soon more of them than he cared to have. Some of them even escaped, and I believe that even as I write, there are piebald rats running wild around the farm-steading of Kildeer.

"Duncan was right," Fred said one Thursday afternoon, "and so to-morrow I'll try to sell my whole stud, stables—that is, cages—and all."

Lilly cried a little to lose her funny pets, though, after all, it was for the best.

But for once in a way the boy was disappointed; so rather than bring them back he took them to Duncan's, and this good fellow kindly took them off his hand, allowing him a fair price for them.

So Fred kept no more rats.

He was still the mouse merchant, however. He bred, and bred, and bred; and when at last he was successful in breeding the most charmingly-beautiful tortoise-shells and other strange colours, and getting as much as ten and even twelve shillings a pair for them, he was indeed a happy boy.

Meanwhile he kept some of the very cleverest of the

mice in separate cages and singly as performers. He loved his mice, his mice loved him; and in these facts lay the whole secret of his success.

He had special cages made for these circus mice as he called them, and made them go through their performances regularly every day. He did not tire them out at any time, however, and he never forgot to reward them when the act was over. In the cages he had perches, little trees, trapezes, and bars—quite a little mousies' gymnasium, in fact, and they played and jumped about all day long, and so kept in training as athletes say. They had also sets of ladders to run up and down.

What all could they do? is a question that may be asked. It would be difficult to say what *all* they did; but they jumped through wee hoops; they did trapze tricks, and shook hands after they had finished; they hauled down French and Russian flags; they steeple-chased like mad-caps or fairy mice over a rough bit of country Fred had made on a board in his workshop; and over and above all these tricks some he had harnessed to little go-carts, and others he used as little pack-mules, panniers and all complete.

But it was not till the second year, and only after very great perseverance, that Fred succeeded in thoroughly training his sporting stud of mice.

By the end of the summer Willie the starling could not only say a great many words and a few mixed-up sentences, but whistle the air called "Duncan Gray,"

and a portion of the Irish tune, "A Sprig of Shillelah." He was a very happy bird because allowed his freedom all day long out in the sunny garden or up in trees, opening anything or everything with that wonderful beak of his, for Willie was of a very inquiring turn of mind.

When he went out for a walk with Lilly he always sat on her shoulder, and at such times he looked very wise and solemn indeed.

Once he followed his mistress to church, and during the sermon commenced to chatter and finally to whistle, so Lilly had to hurry out with him, and on Sundays ever after he was invariably confined to his cage.

But the most curious part of this starling's history remains to be told. He came in time to be very much attached to Gilbert Bruce, and from first tolerating his advances pussy seemed to encourage them.

While she would be lying on the hearth-rug Willie would come and nestle on top of her, or make pretence that her fur was a pool of water, and go through all the motions of bathing. At times he would thrust his beak between Gibbie's toes and spread them out, or even between his lips to examine his teeth. On such occasions Gilbert Bruce would give him a soft pat on the back with his paw, but never put out his nails.

"No such liberties, Master Willie," Gilbert seemed to say. "Familiarity breeds contempt."

Fred still continued to make his own cages, ably assisted as usual by the lissom-fingered Borlem.

Borlem's duties at Kildeer farm were by no means very onerous, consisting chiefly in helping Joe to feed the cows and keep them well bedded and clean, and also to take them occasionally away to the hill for a change of pasturage.

He had also to take Bellack round the "baulks"—that is the bank or space of grass-covered ground next to the stone fences which the plough cannot reach.

Bellack was an old half-bred Highland cow, and a great favourite and pet. She was older even than Fred himself, and probably had as much wisdom in her aged humble head as all the rest of the cows put together possessed.

Bellack was quite a *rara avis* of a cow, to say nothing of the extraordinary amount of creamy milk she used to give. She was an honest cow. Well she knew, that on the baulks the tender green grass, the appetizing weeds, and the scented white clover grew sweeter far than they did on any other part of the farm, and well she knew also that she must not touch the corn that grew close to these bonnie baulks, nor do I think she ever did. The baulks and these alone she looked upon as her particular property, and woe betide any other bovine who dared intrude thereon. Bellack ran at any such intruder without a sound of warning; she knew the tenderest spot to attack, and her polled head came butt against the trespasser's lower ribs with all the force of a battering-ram.

Bellack used to trot waddling home from the baulks

of a summer's evening, without putting anyone to the trouble of going to fetch her. But she did not go straight to the byre. No; she had a tit-bit to receive, and so would stand quietly chewing her cud in a philosophical sort of way at the front door, until Mrs. Hallam came out with a nice quarter of crisp oatcake.

And she never failed to lick the hand that presented it.

"O," Bellack would seem to say, "I do dearly love a morsel of cake. It does put *such* a nice taste in one's mouth when eaten last thing!"

Then she had to have her neck well scratched and her ears smoothed and gently pulled, after which she switched her tail, and went off to the byre. She invariably entered her own stall. All the cows, of course, knew their stalls, but sometimes a yearling would take possession of Bellack's. Then indeed did her Highland blood get up. She first took one astonished angry look at the young intruder. It was as though she were addressing it in the words of Douglas:

"And darest thou then
To beard the lion in his den,
The Douglas in his hall?
And hopest thou hence unscathed to go?—
No, by St. Bride of Bothwell, no!"

Then the battering-ram was put in position, and so severe at times was the punishment inflicted that the yearling would bellow with terror and pain, while Borlem, with his hair almost on end, stood powerless by.

"Now, Borlem," said Fred as he entered the workshop one day, "what do you think I'm going in for next?"

"Couldna say, sir," said Borlem.

"Guineas, lad; guinea-pigs!"

"O, that will be fine fun."

"Yes; and now I've just been down the village ordering wire mesh and weather boarding—bought them very cheap—and with your assistance will start and put up the house right away at once."

In less than an hour the building material had come, and Fred commenced work. He measured off the space to be inclosed first, and it was of the following dimensions:—Six feet wide and eighteen feet long. The caviary itself was to be six feet square and about six feet high, with a door opening on to the twelve-feet-by-six enclosed yard or grass run. The position of caviary and yard was well protected by trees and bushes from the north and east, so that all the sunshine possible should be conserved, for cavies are apt to suffer from draughts.

It took days to put up the place, but all along the work went merrily on, and Fred was either singing or whistling the whole time; that is, unless he happened to be chatting pleasantly with Borlem.

To drive in the main uprights Sandie's strong arms were requisitioned, and when the little couples were put up to make a slanting roof, Sandie volunteered also to do the heather thatching. But this was all.

Beginning at the bottom the weather boarding was now nailed on, piece after piece, each piece o'erlapping that beneath it. A space for a window was left on the south side, for Fred well knew the value of light. The door that opened to the yard was rustic enough, and had leather hinges, but it fitted well and closely. When all the walls were up and the thatch on, the little yard or grass run was made. This had to be as high as the house; the roof, as well as sides, were made of three-quarter-inch galvanized wire. The older cavies could have been kept in with a wider mesh, but there were the young ones to be considered. The wire roof was necessary to keep out vagrant cats.

There was a gate with a padlock to the grass run, and the caviary itself was tarred over.

It was really a charming place when finished, and quite good enough, so said Captain Rowland, to keep golden or silver pheasants in.

(I may state here that in the following spring Fred planted roots of wild convolvulus all round the run, and when they grew up in May they covered the whole place, caviary and all, with a mantle of green through which the hottest rays of the sun were filtered and cooled. Indeed, such a delightful retreat did the grass run make that camp-chairs were placed here, and Fred would sit with a book in it, or Lilly with her white seam, enjoying the gambols of their most interesting pets.)

On the very next Friday after the caviary was com-

plete, with its bedding-boxes filled with dry, sweet hay and the food-tins all in place, Fred brought home the cavies.

"What dear, funny, old-fashioned pets they look!" cried Lilly clapping her hands.

"And so self-possessed, too!"

"Some sort of rats aren't they?" remarked Gael to Gilbert Bruce.

But Gibbie shook his head in the way cats do, as much as to say, "We better not touch. I fancy they come under the head of private property."

"Anyhow," said Gael, "if I happen to find myself inside one of these days, I'll see what they are made of."

The guinea-pigs were two pairs, namely, one pair of very long-haired Peruvians and one pair of longish-haired rough Abyssinians.

It was evident that Fred had been listening to quite a long lecture from his friend Duncan on the points and properties of cavies, for he grew quite eloquent on the subject while talking to his sister.

"Peruvian and Abyssinian!" said Lilly. "I'm afraid, Fred, that I sha'n't remember which is which."

"O, easily, Lill! That pair yonder so coolly eating those cabbage leaves are Peruvians, one white and gray the other reddish-brown. You see those?"

"Yes."

"You notice how long their hair is, hanging over the shoulders and back like a Skye terrier's, and almost burying the face and eyes?"

"O!" said Lilly, "if they weren't eating I shouldn't know which end was the head."

"They are beauties! But the other two, tortoise-shell and white—wasn't I lucky just to secure those! Dear old Duncan!—they are rough, with the hair going this way and that way as if old Bellack had been licking them. These are the Abyssinians, and don't they seem to enjoy that handful of parsley. But I'm going to put a wire partition between the two pairs; they can talk to each other through the wires, but must not get together to fight."

"Well, Lilly," he added, "if you'll take charge of the mice, Borlem, under your command, mind you, shall look after the guineas."

"Very well, Fred; but how shall we feed them, and how often?"

"You better take down what I am going to say your note-book."

And out came Lilly's book and pencil.

"Always keep food in the run. Bread and milk in the morning always fresh and fresh. During the day roots of all sorts that you could eat yourself, and all kinds of nice sweet green food from the garden, and weeds. Mind they are too wise to eat what is poisonous."

"Ou-eek—oo-eek—ou-eek!" cried the Abyssinian, interrupting Fred.

"You hear what they are saying?"

"It sounds like 'Weak, weak, weak.'"

"That's about it. Well, bear this in mind. Cavies

must never be weak. When they cry like that they are hungry. Write that down. They must have plenty of water always fresh. Is that down?"¹

"Wait a minute. Now it is."

"Borlem must keep the place *very* sweet and clean, and all the dishes and the little hutches I shall make, and always have the racks full of sweet, clean hay. I think that is all, Lilly."

"Thank you, Freddy! Now I shall remember everything."

What with his work on the farm, in his father's garden, in the fowl-run, and as acting superintendent over everything, Fred Hallam's time was very much occupied indeed.

But he did not neglect his studies. He kept his classics well up, and even began to dip deeply into mathematics. Many a time and oft the light was seen streaming from his cottage window, when it was all too near midnight for the good of his health.

Nor did he neglect his Saturday afternoon visits to the old man Donald who had saved his life. The advice this ancient mariner gave him was always worth remembering. The liking he had taken for Fred was remarkable. Not that the boy did not deserve to be loved, if only for his manly straightforwardness.

"Ah, Freddie, laddie!" he often told him, "I don't

¹ Cavies do not drink often, but they should have water.

think you are right, mind you, for giving up all idea of becoming a clergyman for the sake of farming."

"I'm not good enough, sir, for a minister," Fred would reply.

"Boy, boy," said Donald solemnly, "which of us is good enough in this world to do the will of Heaven and teach the people. Clothed in our own goodness, my laddie, we are no better dressed than I am in this old patched coat and rag-mended slippers. But your mother is right, Fred, your mother is right. There is no calling so honourable, and not one in all the wide world so peaceful as that of a meek and lowly minister, who does his duty to the best of his ability here below, and looks for his reward only in the glory of a bright hereafter."

Those words sunk deep into Fred's heart, and engraved themselves on his memory, and many and many a time in after life did he think of them.





CHAPTER XVIII.

DADDY AND BOB: A KIND FATHER AND PRODIGAL SON
—POOR DADDY'S DEATH—A MARRIAGE AND A
BONFIRE—RACING THROUGH THE SMOKE.

SUMMER and autumn rolled by, winter came and winter went, but life at the old farm of Kildeer hardly altered.

Sandie M'Byres and Jeannie seemed to be fixtures, and so was Borlem. None of them cared to leave, and this only proved that Mr. Hallam was a kindly master, and had some regard for the feelings of his servants. Were they not made of the same flesh and blood as he himself was? They were. Yet how seldom do Scotch farmers remember this; and servants in the far north are too often treated as slaves, and receive less consideration than do the horses that drag the plough, or the "nowt" that stand in the stalls.

Lilly's mice continued to thrive, though she had lost several from sickness.

Borlem's "piggies," as he called his charge, were a wonderful success. They had had several litters already, and these, when weaned, Fred had taken to town in

fancy cages, along with one of the parents, to show them off, and he never failed to sell his stock at good prices. So the boy considered himself in a fair way to get rich, that is, what *he* considered rich.

The coming of the first litter of Abyssinians was an event never to be forgotten.

Daddy, as the beautiful wee boar was called, had been highly jubilant one morning in autumn, and busy carrying in morsels of parsley and cabbage to his hutch. With his experience of the mousies that came down on the moonbeams, and from the air of great importance that Daddy assumed, Fred suspected what had occurred.

But his notions of the birth of guinea-pigs were in one way quite erroneous; he naturally imagined that, like his mice and rats, they would be born naked, colourless, and blind.

Not they; here they were all running about their mother and Daddy, with bright black beads of eyes as open as daisies, completely dressed in lovely coats of coloured fur, and as full of fun and self-assurance as if each of them had been left a thousand a year. Rather droll in shape they were though, their heads and ears being out of all proportion to the size of their bodies.

Fred had hurried away to tell Lilly the joyful news.

“O, Lill,” he cried, “the young cavies have come. And what do you think, Lilly?—they’ve all come down to breakfast the very first day.”

"But they'll catch their death of cold, Fred."

"O, no, Lilly! they have all got their jackets on, such funny wee tots you never did see. And so self-possessed. They just look like young ladies newly home from a boarding-school, with their luggage all at the station waiting to be sent for. Hurry down, Lill, quickly!"

The wee things were able to pick a morsel of parsley next day. And wasn't Daddy proud! He did not seem to know which he ought to feed first, his little wife or his consequential little tots of children. Not only as regards this litter, but all that followed, Daddy at once assumed all the duties and responsibilities of more than a father, for he nursed and fed and cleaned the young ones, and had them to sleep all round him, often remaining indoors for this purpose when he might have been gambolling in the sunshine. So, on the whole, Mrs. Daddy had very little to do except to enjoy herself.

No wonder everybody came to love and respect poor Daddy.

Daddy's life, however, was not entirely free from trouble. A grown-up son for a time became a thorn in his father's side. This bad boy—Bob was his name—took early to evil courses. He had found a tiny hole in the wire netting, and, braving all dangers, used to go out into the garden and among the bushes to see what the world was like, and would come home in the evenings considerably the worse of—well, not of drink,

perhaps, but say sow-thistle. Anyhow, on such occasions he was bad-tempered, and felt unfilial enough to fight his father. He would fly at him literally with tooth and nail, and his mother did nothing but look on, for, strange to say, Bob was his mother's favourite.

Every effort had been made by Lilly and Fred to establish friendly relations 'twixt father and son. It was no fault of Daddy's, remember. Daddy was as fond of his erring boy as possible. But Bob was incorrigible, and all attempts at reconciliation had to be abandoned after a time. When, however, the young rascal one evening slit his poor father's upper lip open, Fred and Lilly agreed that the crisis had come, so Bob was made prisoner, kept in strict confinement till Friday, then tried by court-martial and sold for a shilling.

Daddy was more happy now.

But, alas! his life was but a brief one. Somehow or other he caught cold, and one of the scourges of the caviary, namely, consumption, was rapidly developed. He refused food for several days, and looked weird and worn about the eyes. He sat huddled up in the darkest corner of the caviary. But he seemed in no pain, and passed quietly enough away at last.

No wonder Lilly wept when Fred dug a little grave and buried him in leaves. What made the matter doubly sad, was the fact that Mrs. Daddy soon after had another litter, and there was no Daddy this time to feed them and her, to bring them the juiciest bites

of parsley, and the most succulent morsels of sow-thistle. Heigho!

All in one breath, and sung or drawled from the precentor's pulpit in the old-fashioned church of Drumdale, came, one lovely Sabbath morning, the following announcement.

"I—hereby—intimate—a—purpose—of—marriage—betwixt—Captain—Thomas—Rowland—of—the—93d—Highlanders—and—Miss—Lavinia—Venner—for—the—first—second—third—and—last—time."

The parishioners were awe-struck. Marriages in high life did not take place very often in Drumdale, and although they expected that Captain Rowland and Miss Venner would be married some day, the suddenness of the announcement quite took their breath away. Old Mr. Saunders droned from the pulpit that day in logic as dry as ever, but I fear he was not listened to with the amount of attention usually bestowed on his learned discourse. I fear, too, that on their way to "their respective places of abode," as the parson phrased it in his last prayer, it was the marriage and not the sermon the good folks discussed.

Nor was there much else spoken about save the coming "grand weddin" for the next week to come.

There were bits of new news flying about every day, something fresh about the happy pair both morning and evening.

Lilly's delight and pride knew no bounds when she

received an invitation to Fernleigh, the residence of the Vanners, and was actually asked to become one of the bridesmaids.

Let me say, and be done with it, that a sweeter young face or prettier little figure than Lilly's was not at Fernleigh on the eventful day.

The marriage, the breakfast, and the farewells passed over as pleasantly as could be expected. There were showers of rice, showers of tears, and showers of old shoes, and all the way to the distant station the parishioners were in groups here and there on the road, and many a wild hurrah rent the air, and many a *few de joie* was fired, as carriage and postilions went trotting past.

Even at the station the rejoicing was kept up. The Vanners and Captain Rowland had been very kind to old Donald, and lo! here he was on the platform, with a beautiful bouquet of wild moorland flowers and grasses for the bride. Ah, yes! and he had something else to give the young folks too—an old man's blessing.

"God bless and keep you, Mrs. Rowland!" he said, with his bonnet off and his long white hair floating over his shoulders, "and God bless and keep you both!"

Then amidst such cheering as had not been heard before since the queen landed there, away rattled the train and the good folks returned in peace to their homes.

But bonfires that night blazed all over the parish.

Nor had Fred forgotten to prepare his bonfire, for

days and days in their spare time, Borlem and the orra man had been engaged in taking barrow-loads of brushwood and odds and ends from the farm-steading, up to a knoll that overlooked the river, and a large portion of the surrounding district also. An old tar barrel had been placed in the centre, and a bucket of tar was kept in reserve to make things blaze, to say nothing of a quantity of green spruce and pine branches to cause smoke and to crackle.

"Man, Freddy," Sandie M'Byres had said, "I wadna gie a pinch o' snuff for a bonfire that was all a blaze, just a puff and awa wi' it like. I like first a big lowe (plenty of flame), then smqke dense eneuch to kill bees, then the lowe again and crickle-crackling a' the time."

"That's it, Sandie. Well, we'll have a mighty big pile up yonder anyhow."

It fell dark at last, and though the clouds were very high and there was not the slightest sign of rain, there were no stars to be seen, so the night was intensely dark.

All the young folks at the farm turned out, and took their way to the high ground on which the fire would soon be lighted. Even Jeannie had hurried through with her milking that she too might be present.

The dogs were there in all their glory, and, wonder of wonders, the craigit heron also. This philosophical bird must have thought that something more than common was in the wind, else he would hardly have

let down his second leg and left his cosy corner in Sandie's bothy.

Arrived at the scene of action the tar was sprinkled and poured upon the pile, and then a match was applied at the lower side. There was not a breath of wind, but this signified but very little, for bonfires make or draw the air that feed them.

"Stan' back," cried Sandie as the flames evinced an inclination to shoot sky-high at the very outset.

And everybody had to stand back, for the heat of the burning tar and wood soon became intense.

Both Fred and Lilly were excitedly delighted. They had never seen such a blaze before. Borlem was so rejoiced that he had to stand upon his head—a favourite position of this queer boy when he was extra well pleased—and if innocent Jeannie said "My conscience!" once this evening, she said it fifty times.

But it really was a lovely bonfire!

As soon as the tar was consumed the fire settled down to serious business, and attacked the wood in right good earnest, while Sandie with a long fork in his hand, stood by to feed the flames with outlying branches, and with the green, smoke-causing spruce and Scotch pine.

How it crackled and how it blazed, to be sure! And how it fizzed, and whistled even! What with the crackling and fizzing, it sounded to Fred's ears as if there were people in the fire, or rather gnomes, now talking aloud and now whispering to each other in

quite a mysterious way. Meanwhile tongues of fire, like living devouring spirits, danced upwards and caught the highest branches, and twisted round them, then leapt higher still, cloudwards even, among the dense white and gray smoke till lost to view.

But how hot Fred felt it, especially when he took the fork to assist Sandie in feeding the fire! One cheek would then feel as if the skin were peeling off, while the other felt like ice in the current of cold swishing air that the bonfire drew towards it. Nay, the wind seemed to go roaring into and right through the blaze, carrying the sparks zenithwards like showers of golden snow.

But our young folks were not content with simply looking on. To simply look on at a bonfire may be English fashion, and I doubt even that, but it certainly is not Scotch.

“Hurrah!” cried Fred at last; “who says a run through the smoke?”

“Hurrah!” echoed Borlem; “I’m in the play.”

“Hurrah!” shouted Joe, the orra man; “I’ll follow ma leader.”

“Bide a wec,” said Sandie, “and I’ll gie ye some smoke worth running through.”

As he spoke he heaped more green branches on the pile; the flames were for a moment subdued, but the smoke was ten times denser than before.

Off they went now, rushing and running round and round the roaring fire, with many an eldritch shout and

scream, seen for a moment in a Rembrandtesque sort of way as they filed in front of the red-yellow blaze, and anon disappeared in the dense white smoke behind. The wonder appeared to be that they emerged alive and were not choked. They got blacker in face as the fun went on; even Lilly and Jeannie's clear complexions were darkened till they really began to look, as Sandie said, "like uncanny creatures from the nether world."

Hitherto the dogs had remained aloof; they had business of their own on hand, namely, to hunt for mice and moudieworts (moles) along the hedge. But the excitement spread to them at last.

"Bowf-wow!" cried Torlath, "let us join the fun."

And off they rushed, and were soon the chief actors in this mad *melée* of a *merry-go-round*. Indeed it was averred by Sandie that though Torlath kept well on the outside of the circle, daft wee Gael had been seen several times to dash right through the flames themselves. But then Gael, as we know, belonged to that grand race of Aberdeenshire terriers that fear neither fire nor water.

During all this wild war-dance, that imperturbable heron stood on a stone with his bill on his breast, fast asleep.

Ah! well, everything has an end, and at long last the great bonfire began to burn low and die away to ember and to ash, and so the young folks went homewards laughing and singing, and left it to smoulder.

It was well on in the month of July. The farm of Kildeer seemed to flourish like a green bay tree. The men were busy mowing down the hay, which lay on the fields in clover-scented swaths; the lazy cows were in groups on the daisied leas, or stood contentedly chewing the cud knee-deep in the clear waters of the Don; the horses were just as idle also. It was holiday time with them, and they had but little to do when tired of the grass, except to stand fondly nibbling each other's shoulders, or occasionally take a wild scamper round and round the field.

Fred was returning one evening from the station. It was Friday and he had had a very successful bazaar day. Lilly had helped this success considerably, for she had knitted quite a quantity of mits for sale, and woollen cuffs, and had made fully a dozen little pin-cushions, all prettily surrounded with loops of the dried pith of the moorland rushes.

The evening was so bright and clear, the country so lovely, and the air so dreamily balmy, that Fred was making no great hurry home, and the pony was almost nodding in the shafts.

When within two miles of Kildeer he met Lilly, and by the way she was waving her handkerchief, he knew that she must have some news to give him, and that it was good news. So he wakened the pony with a touch of the whip, and soon stopped beside his sister, who was gathering crimson wild-flowers on the bank.



W. PARKINS

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LILLY MEETS FRED ON HIS RETURN FROM MARKET.

"Jump up, Lilly. There is room for you on Jeannie's knee. Now, what is it?"

"A letter! that's what it is. Fancy your having a letter, and from London too!"

"And where is it?"

"O, at home. But, Fred, I feel sure it is from Mrs. Rowland. It is a lady's writing, and just like hers."

Lilly was right; the letter was from Mrs. Rowland, and contained an urgent request that Fred should come up to London and spend a fortnight in sight-seeing.

There was an inclosure also from Captain Rowland, and a very kindly one it was—a railway pass.

"Now, aren't you happy?" cried Lilly. "O dear me! I wish I was going to that wonderful city, with its streets all laid in gold, and its clear and shining river, which, from all I have heard, Fred, must be miles upon miles in breadth. There can't be any poverty in London like what we have in Drumdale parish, and everybody must be dressed in silks and satins, and the queen herself walking up and down the beautiful Strand, with her crown on her head and her diamond sceptre in her hand. Heigho! you're the lucky boy, Fred, and, O dear me, I wish again that I were going too!"

Perhaps Fred's ideas about London were not quite so exalted as Lilly's; but they were very high indeed.

"I'm sure, Lilly," he said to comfort her, "I wish you were going with me; but one of us must stop at home to look after the stock. Never mind, I shall buy you something both nice and pretty."

Lilly had never been parted from her brother before. She scarcely slept a wink the night previous to his departure, and silent and fast flowed her tears when she bade him adieu. She stood on the knoll where the fire had been, waving her handkerchief to him, till a turn of the road hid the cart from her view, then went slowly and sadly homewards.





CHAPTER XIX.

WHAT FRED SAW IN LONDON—"KOAKIE"—"THAT BIRD'S NO CANNY!" CRIED JEANNIE—RABBITS AND CANARIES.

THE oats and barley in the fields around Kildeer were changing from green to gold, and the crimson poppies had shed their petals, before Fred returned from London. For in the town house of the Rowlands, his clear young voice and unsophisticated manners had been as welcome as flowers in May, so that his visit had lasted nearly a month instead of a fortnight.

And during all this time young Borlem had attended to his cottage and garden, and gone regularly to Aberdeen with Jeannie and the butter every Friday. Nor had Fred's bazaar been neglected; no, for his *clientèle* still found plenty of green food for their birds, to say nothing of bunches of wild-flowers, and last, but not least, baby mice and guinea-pigs."

But Fred returned home at length, looking none the worse for his period of gentle dissipation. And Lilly hardly knew how much to make of him at first. It had seemed, she averred, like a whole year since he had gone away. She was happy indeed to receive the

pretty bracelet and the hat, that Fred had bought her and brought her. But, ah! he had brought himself home safe and sound, and that was better than anything else.

In his talk Lilly even fancied she descried a little of the London accent, but I think this was only her imagination.

Borlem gave an account of his stewardship, and handed, with pride in his eyes, to his master the money he had received from the bazaar. And Fred thanked him and gave him a lovely little fishing-rod, with line and flies and reel complete. Sandie received a snuff-box, and Mrs. Rowland had sent a gift to Lilly, and a nice new collar for Torlath and one for the spitfire terrier Gael.

Concerning a gift from the Rowlands to Fred himself I shall speak presently.

On the evening of the boy's return, the family were all gathered round the low fire of peats and logs, for up in the North even in August a blaze on the hearth hath its charms, Torlath, looking resplendent in that crimson collar, was on the rug, and Dick in his arbour-covered cage rang out a joyous song in every lull of the conversation.

"Well, Fred, lad," said his father, laying down his newspaper, "what did you think of London?"

"And its streets of beaten gold," added Lilly, "and its broad and shining river."

"I like London, and I don't," was Fred's reply; "but

O, silly Lilly, the streets are not laid with gold, but rather with an inferior kind of mud. I didn't see a single house with solid silver window-frames; and as for the river, it is little more than a vilely-smelling sluggish ditch. Give me the winding Don or Dee before the Thames, father."

" Well, lad?"

" Well, father, at first when you land at King's Cross Station, there is such a din and such running and row that one gets quite confused, and when you emerge from the station, why, at first, father, you cannot see the place for dirty houses and dirty streets. But of course, father, you've been there scores and scores of times."

" Yes, Fred, but go on. You're original, and first impressions are good fun, if not fact."

" But, Lilly," continued Fred, " the common people speak with such a strange accent, that it is difficult to tell what they are driving at. And in talking they are guilty of sins of omission and sins of commission, especially with the letter H."

" How, Fred, tell me?"

" Well, they take the letter away from its proper place and stick it on where it isn't wanted. This is what I heard one gentleman's servant telling another, as I stood in the tobacconist's shop buying snuff for Sandie M'Byres: 'Well, Beel, has I were a-going hupstairs promiscuous-like, I meets the 'ousemaid, and says she to me, she says, says she, "Arry," she says, 'you're a daisy.'

And with that, Beel, I hups and says, "Arriet, you're a hanthelmintic;" and lor'! weren't 'Arriet proud just?' And, Lilly, a Cockney couldn't say "Bick-bick-bick-birrr-rr-rr," to save his little life. Of course the Rowlands talk beautifully; but I did hear one lady—she was covered in jewelry from top to toe, almost—who was all at sea with her H's and R's, and another who called the French town of Havre—*Ha've.*"

"But London is a very big place, isn't it?"

"Yes, Lilly, you might live in London for a hundred years and not see it all."

"Bigger than Aberdeen?"

"Bigger than fifty Aberdeens," said Fred, laughing at his sister's innocent remark.

"So," said Mr. Hallam, "you weren't much impressed with London?"

"Not London out of doors. But London indoors, ah! that indeed, father. The Rowlands were so kind, and took me everywhere, and some of the houses were so grand inside, that I felt almost afraid to walk on the beautiful carpets.

"Well, Lilly, I think I was taken to every picture-gallery in the city, and I came away from each, wishing I could be an artist. I heard the best violin player in the world, and I came away from that concert wishing I could be a musician."

"I'm afraid, lad, you're a good deal like a baby crying for the moon. Well, did you go to the theatres?"

"Yes—s," said Fred thoughtfully.

"But," he added, "that is all like a dream, father, the dream of a world that I have nothing to do with. Somehow I would rather forget it; the thoughts of it would stand between me and my studies."

"Then, Lilly, we went to the Zoo. That, also, is like a dream, for the place is so big and great that I could not remember the tenth part of what I saw, though much I should like to."

"Tell us something," said Lilly.

"Well, you know, they are called the Zoological Gardens, and these gardens are of immense extent, and stand in a very splendid park, or at least a park that would be splendid were it not so level, and were the black smuts not constantly falling on the green leaves. But in the gardens themselves are lovely walks and terraces, and ribboned flower-beds more gorgeous, Lill, than anything you could possibly imagine. And then lion houses, and elephant houses, and yards, and ponds, and cages, and places for almost every kind of beast, or bird, or reptile that moves, or flies, or creeps.

"I think," continued Fred after a minute's pause, during which time he sat gazing into the fire, "the birds that impressed me most were the Indian adjutants. Not so very much unlike Sandie's heron, but O, infinitely droller in every way, and infinitely uglier. They stood on one leg, but their poor bare heads were bleeding, and perhaps they had been fighting. The white cranes were worth going a hundred miles to see,

and the black and white storks. The laughing jackass or kingfisher was another droll bird. Some man cried 'Hoo, hoo, hoo!' to one of them, and he laughed till I had to put my fingers in my ears. Then there were lovely pigeons, and the bower-bird.

"The pheasants, Lilly, would have pleased you, but the vultures were an ugly lot. I almost cried to see our own mountain golden eagle near these. He was out of plumage, and did look so miserable and so unhappy.

"The fishes, and seals, and ducks, and swans enjoy themselves most, I think, in the Zoo, because, you see, they are comparatively free. The various species of deer and buffalo looked well fed and sleek also. And the elephants were really happy-go-lucky kind of fellows. The rhinoceros also, and the hippopotamus, took things as they came; but many of the wilder animals, Lilly, appeared to be just skin, and bone, and grief, especially some fine lions and tigers.

"The cockatoos and parrots were quite at home, and laughed, and talked, and chatted, and shook hands with anyone or everybody, not caring apparently whether he might be a king or a costermonger. The kangaroos were very fidgety, and, I suppose, longed to have a game of hop-step-and-jump round the garden.

"A mild sort of melancholy seemed to weigh down the minds of the poor chimpanzee, and the monkeys looked as if they would all have been better off clean straw and a bath."

"And you saw the bears?"

"O, Lilly, the least said about those the better. They did look unhappy, and if I live to be as old as Methuselah, I shall never forget the almost sightless milky eyes of one poor old fellow. No, Lilly, I'll tell you more again perhaps. I can't get the bears out of my head, and I would give all the money I have in the world, to let that old one free to end his life in his native woods."

"Well," said his father, "you've told us a very pretty story in a simple sort of way, and we are all right glad to have you back among us, and to know you still love puir auld Scotland."

"Father," said Fred with enthusiasm, "I wouldn't give one day among our own bonnie hills and glens for ages spent in London."

"And now, mamma," Mr. Hallam added, "bring us the Good Book, for Fred I'm sure is tired."

"A little, father. I don't think I'll want any one to sing me to sleep to-night."

I have come to the conclusion, after a good many years' study and a deal of personal experience, that the refreshment gained from sleep is not in proportion to the length of time one is wrapt in slumber, but to the depth and genuineness of the sleep itself. If one is dreaming all throughout the livelong night one is really half awake, and cannot expect to feel over bright next morning.

Now, there is no sleep so sweet as that which succeeds active exercise or manual labour. This is a hint worth remembering.

Fred, then, went to bed rather pleasantly tired than otherwise, and he slept like a dozen tops rolled into one, and awoke next day in what he called fine form.

"Ah!" he said to Lilly as he supped his porridge, "there is nothing of this sort to eat in London, so I really don't wonder at the cockney boys being so pale-faced and skinny. Jeannie, how is the cockatoo?"

"He's gey quiet now, Freddy, but he has had an awfu' mornin' o't, Borlem says, dancin' and singin' and carryin' on, nae ordinar'."

Fred laughed. "He is such a darling, and we had no end of fun with him coming down in the train."

"Weel," said Jeannie, "fun here or fun there, I hope the bird's no a heathen. Mind what day the morn is, Freddy. If he is a bird that doesna respeck the Sawbath, the seener (sooner) you draw his neck the better."

As soon as breakfast was finished Fred and his sister hurried up to the cottage, to see the gift that the boy had received from the Rowlands.

"How well Borlem has kept my garden!" said Fred. "How lovely the flowers look! And the rockery! I never saw the blossoms on the convolvulus so big or so white before. Ah! Lilly, there is no place like home; but you've been superintending Borlem?"

"Sometimes," Lilly said.

And now they entered the cottage. The cockatoo was honoured with a place in the study or boudoir, and here too was Willie's cage.

"Poo—or Willie!" said the starling when he saw Fred.

The boy let him out, and his quiet but demonstrative affection was quite touching. He kissed Fred by sticking his beak between his lips, then nestled down right under his chin.

It was just as if he had said: "I'm at home now, and I don't care for all the world."

"Come on! come on! Where are you? Koakie's all right. Come on. Play up. Koakie's all—Koakie—Koakie—Caw—w—w."

It was the cockatoo who spoke.

"O," cried Lilly, "what a strange-looking bird! but dirty and disreputable looking."

Koakie, as he persisted in calling himself, was certainly no beauty. He was nevertheless a very large and excellent specimen of the hard-billed West Australian cockatoo. White all over, excepting under his wings, which he seldom lifted. No crest, though he could raise the feathers on his head, and all blue around the eyes. In fact he looked in shape like a parrot.

His colour was white. I only wish I could say pure white. In his native woods he might have been, but no old clucking hen could have been of a dirtier white than Koakie was now.

round and round in a circle, talking and shouting all the time. "Play up, play up. Hooch! hooch!¹ Koakie's right."

Fred, still whistling, put his cane on a level with the bird's back. Koakie lowered his head and neck, his bill touching his wing, and danced madly on as before, till he began to stagger with lightness of the head. Then he danced round in the contrary direction to restore his cerebral equilibrium, and finally ended his performance with such a mad and merry shout of laughter that even Jeannie herself, for the life of her, couldn't help joining.

"Weel," she said, "he's a daft bird. I only just trust he'll respeck the Sawbath. That's a'."

But Koakie went through many other tricks. Fred gave him a pen-holder, and he beat time like a conductor to a tune the boy whistled. He unloaded a little truck of nails to command, and reloading them again wheeled them away and emptied them all on the floor.

But now Gilbert Bruce came in, and Koakie emitted a yell that might have been heard a mile away. Off flew the cat, but he and Koakie were sworn enemies after that hour.

Koakie's food was bread and milk, maize, oats, wheat, and a little hemp. He drank plenty of water,

¹ This wonderful bird was one of the author's special pets. He used to be taken to "Penny Readings." He never failed to go through all his performances as soon as the cage door was open. His droll antics and merry shrill laugh always brought down the house.—G.S.

but always refused to take a bath. He was tame enough to run all over the garden, but would always jump on to Fred's hand when called.

"Lilly," said Fred one Thursday evening, "I'm going in for rabbits."

"How nice! What sort, dear?"

"O, lops, I think. You're always sure of a market for these. Then by and by we'll have fancy breeds, and we may also breed big sorts, half-caste, Belgian hares, and Patagonians. Mind you, I mean to have a regular rabbit farm. I've bought one very nice hutch, and that will be my pattern."

And sure enough, on the very next day Fred brought home his lops, beautiful butterfly smuts, exceedingly long in ears, with glorious dewlaps, in good condition, young and full in eye.

Now for the benefit of any reader who may desire to do as Fred did, I may here state that the boy's rabbitry was quite a success. That during the ensuing summer he made more solid cash from his rabbits than he had done by his mice, and rats, and guinea-pigs all put together. And it will be but right to mention some of the secrets of this success.

First, then, he had the biggest and roomiest hutches that he could make. He thatched these to keep the leakage out, and to keep them cool in summer and warm in winter. His rabbit-court was large, and well placed for sunlight and shelter from the north and east. The

hutches were portable, and could in winter be lifted into the old storehouse. He kept them dry and clean—always—so he never had mange or dropsy among his stock. He kept a large heap of bedding under a shed. This was chiefly withered breckans and grass cut by Borlem at the roadsides. He was careful in the selection of his stock for breeding, choosing only young healthy hardy ones. In the matter of feeding he was regularity personified. •

It was probably Fred's success with rabbits that caused him to be so ambitious, and determined his "going in" for canaries, as the phrase stands.

So, as early as October he had purchased a German breeding cage from his friend Duncan, and also a pair of Norwich canaries, *young, healthy, bold, and bright*, from this same naturalist as early as the month of November.

Duncan had also presented him with a small but exceedingly useful shilling manual, with good and earnest advice to study it.

"For," said that worthy, "you never cad get od without a book, deither you dor doboddy else. By Bary cad tell you that."

Mary corroborated her father's statement.

"You mustn't pair your birds," added Duncan, "before the biddle of Barch. Beadwhile keep theb id separate cages, and feed od black and white cadary seeds (two parts of cadary seed and one part of subber rape), and rebeber this, give no daidties."

"No what?" said Fred.

"No dainties," said Mary.

The birds were really lovely specimens. They were kept in the cottage because they could there have the constant companionship of either Borlem or Fred. And having canaries properly tamed is half the battle in breeding.

But now an event occurred that cast a gloom over the spirits of our young financier for many a day.





CHAPTER XX.

DEATH OF DICK THE POET—KOAKIE, THE CAT, AND
THE STARLING—A LOVELY WEE EGG IN THE
CANARIES' NEST—LILLY AND THE WILD BIRDS.

IMUST hurry over and past the demise of poor Dick the Poet. It is not a pleasant subject.

The grief which it is but human nature to feel for the death of a pet bird or other animal, that we have had long, and that has endeared itself to us by its faithfulness and winning ways, is always hard to bear. But it is doubly so when the creature has died through some neglect of our own.

It was so as regards the death of the Poet, so it will be observed that I do not claim perfection for my hero, kind and all as he was to every animal under his charge.

Dick had been suffering from a little cold for some time, and every morning, to his drinking water had been added a pea-sized morsel of gum-arabic and a small tea-spoonful of glycerine.

No. The bird was not delicate as to constitution, but every night of his life he had had his cage covered

up against night draughts or cold with a piece of red flannel.

One evening, in the deepest gloomiest part of the winter, some neighbours had called in, and the conversation had been so interesting that it was nearly ten o'clock before they left. The night was clear and starry, the frost was intense.

About six o'clock next morning Fred awoke shivering with the cold, for Scotch boys seldom have the luxury of a fire in their bed-rooms.

But suddenly a thought rushed across his mind, that made his pulse beat quick and wild.

"O, dear," he said aloud, "I forgot, and Lilly forgot, to cover up the Poet last night!"

He sprang out of bed. He would make his way down-stairs in the dark. If he talked to the bird it would begin to hop about, and he would hear it.

He felt for the parlour, and opened it. How dark and still it was! "Dick, Dick!" he cried, "Poet, Poet!"

But no chirp came in reply, not even the welcome rattling of the cage wires. "How strange!" he thought.

Then a big wave of fear rushed over his heart, and he hurried away for a light.

The bird was not on his perch. Dim though the tallow-dip was burning, Fred could see that at a glance.

But, ah me! there is a little yellow ruffled ball lying on the bottom of the cage—and that is Dick—dead and stiff.

The poor drop of water in the glass was frozen hard—that itself told a tale—and the thermometer near the cage was far down towards zero.

Fred did not spare himself.

“He died through my wicked neglect, Lilly,” he said over and over again, “and I shall never forget it, and never forgive myself.”

Nor did he.

Willie the starling increased his vocabulary almost every week, and from Fred’s whistling constantly to him he soon became a very good musician.

His music lessons were taken while he sat in the cage. He used to listen most attentively, crouching down to do so. After Fred finished the complete air, he whistled a bar of it over and over again, and that bar, note after note, Willie learned, then he was taught the next.

There were really strange friendships among the pets of Kildeer farm. For example, Gael and Gilbert Bruce were constant companions in the hunting field. Gilbert was extremely fond of Willie and Willie of him. Gael hated Willie, and Willie took every opportunity of calling Gael a rascal—a term he had picked up from Koakie with many others, for one talking bird teaches another in a very remarkable way. Gilbert and the cockatoo were soon enemies. The cockatoo and Willie, although constantly running about in the same room, were also at daggers drawn. In fact,

Koakie had made many attempts on Willie's life, and had one day seized him by the tail and pulled nearly every feather out. However, it was in the spring-time, and the tail soon began to sprout again. But until it did sprout Willie's powers of flight were at a somewhat low ebb.

The following is an anecdote that illustrates the sort of intercourse existing between Willie, Koakie, and the cat.

One day Willie and Koakie were both on the cottage floor, pattering about examining things, Willie catching a fly now and then, Koakie talking in a low key.

Near by sat Fred hard at study. He happened to notice, however, that Koakie was edging nearer and nearer to the starling. Suddenly, with lowered head and wings outspread, he made a rush towards Willie. It was well for the latter he had his weather-eye open; else there would have been another dead bird to bury.

But to-day Willie seemed bent on teasing Koakie. He would run for a little way, then, turning round, hurl a bar or two of "Duncan Gray," first the music, then the words, at Koakie's head.

"Duncan Gray came here to woo," Willie shouted, "here to woo—here to woo—you *rasaal*!"

Koakie got near enough once more to make another rush for the starling. Blood alone he seemed to think could wipe out such extra insolence. It was a narrow escape for Willie this time. He had just got the word "Duncan" nearly out, but it ended in a frightened

scream. An unexpected ally, however, now appeared on the scene, no less illustrious an individual indeed than Gilbert the Bruce himself.

His great namesake the Bruce of Bannockburn rode not forth with greater *vim*, to slay the vainglorious but fierce De Boune, than rushed that cat against that cockatoo. With tail and hair erect, ears flattened against the neck, and eyes that glared like those of a tiger, puss dealt him a sounding staggering blow that laid the West Australian sprawling on his side.

"Bravo! Bravo!" from Willie, who now jumped up on the table, and as "Duncan Gray" did not seem to meet the requirements of so momentous an occasion, he burst into "A Sprig of Shillelah and Shamrock so Green."

Koakie retired into a corner to consider, and Gibbie sat down to wash his face.

Koakie soon revived, however, and walking, or rather waddling, to the hearth, made great pretence to be examining morsels of peat and wood, laughing low and derisively to himself as he did so.

Half an hour afterwards and pussy is fast asleep near Fred's chair.

Now is Koakie's time for revenge. No weasel could have tiptoed more silently up to a sleeping cat. When close alongside of her he gives vent to a sudden shriek that might have awakened Rip van Winkle. Fred puts his fingers in his ears. Willie crouches and trembles. and Gilbert, with tail like a bottle-brush,

starts from his slumber, and with a single spring dives through the open window, while once again Koakie emits that quiet but indescribably derisive laugh of his.

So the play is at an end.

Fred used to wonder what other birds thought of Willie, as he sat out of doors piping tunes in the old laburnum tree or catching flies to himself. He called the sparrows "rascals." He called the sleepy heron a "rascal" when he saw him sinking into slumber with the hind-leg of a half-swallowed frog sticking out of his mouth. He got on the back of sheep in autumn among other starlings and called them "rascals" all round.

There was in the cottage garden a semi-tame hedgehog, that used to go and come in the most mysterious manner. Him Willie encountered one day in the garden, and probably began investigating. Very likely he received a stab for his pains. At all events, hearing a row, Fred ran out. The hoggie was curled up in a ball with all his bayonets fixed, and Willie, highly indignant, was treating him to the words Koakie had taught him.

"You're a rascal! You *are*, you *are*, you *ARE*."

Fred had a pet toad in his garden that used to crawl away out of sight when he heard a strange footstep, but would permit the boy to smooth him with a twig or even his little finger. This toad would sit like a sphinx for hours in the sunshine, every now and then

darting out his lightning-tipped tongue and catching a passing fly. Fred had called his toad "Krunk"—not a very euphonious name—but the creature seemed to know it. Krunk was a source of endless wonder to Willie. He would sit quietly near him for half an hour at a time, only giving vent to a sound like "Tse, tse, tse, tse," as if in surprise when Krunk caught a fly.

If the starling could have expressed his thoughts in words they would have been something like the following:

"Dear me! dear me! Master Krunk, how extremely clever you are! I'm absurdly fond of flies myself, and if I could only catch them as nimbly as you do I shouldn't be able to sleep for laughing. Dear me! dear me!"

His friend Duncan being so loud in praise of the German breeding-cages, it was very natural that Fred should purchase this style; so he got two, as he intended keeping more than one pair of birds. Nor was he disappointed with his purchases.

They were plain-looking long wooden cages, barred only in front—I believe I am describing them rightly—with a door in each gable, and two seed-drawers, one for the nesting apartment and one for the main room of the cage. The wire partition that divided these two rooms could be withdrawn at pleasure, and each cage had three drinking-fountains, and the nest,

bought ready-made and lined, was first placed in the smaller compartment. The nests were made of leather, lined with lambskin with wool on it, so that the birds required no building material, although Fred put a little between the bars for the birds to play with.

Now when the middle of March at length arrived—and how Fred had longed for it, to be sure!—the weather being fine and mild, he proceeded to carry out Duncan's instructions to the letter. He placed a breeding-cage in the workshop of the cottage, where either himself or Borlem was, in and out, all day. This was also following German tactics, for in the Fatherland shoemakers and workmen of all sorts have the cages close beside them, and the birds so bred are far more tame and bold than those brought up strictly in English style.

Well, Fred put the hen in the small compartment and the he-bird in the large or living room, with seed and water in both.

In a day or two he noticed that the he-bird was presenting the she one with grains of his canary-seed, and that she was graciously accepting the tit-bits.

"My dear," the he-bird seemed to say, "you'll find these seeds far superior to yours. They are a better brand."

"So they are," she answered. "They are truly delicious."

The seeds were the same nevertheless.

Friendly relations being thus established between

these lovely birds, the next thing Fred did was to withdraw the partition, and the cage was now one long room.

Of course the boy always paid a visit to his birds before he took his own breakfast, and one morning, to his inexpressible delight, he found a lovely wee egg in the nest. To give the reader any idea of the happiness, combined with officious pomposity, that Dick displayed now would be quite impossible.

"Go back to your nest, my dear," he seemed to tell his little wife. "You are not at all strong, you know. I'll keep you going with food."

Then away he flew, and bringing a nice morsel of egg and bread-crumb, he rammed it into her open bill. He brought her seeds too.

Fred knew that his birds must now have not only the usual seeds, but a supply of this egg and bread—or biscuit—crumb. He made it thus: first he had the egg boiled very hard and grated as fine as fine could be; it was then intimately mixed with about the same quantity of stale bread or milk biscuit pounded; and, lo! the thing was done. *But* he did not make more than lasted a day, each bird requiring about two teaspoonfuls. The sparrows and cock-robin had what was left every morning, so there was no actual waste.

Sparrows indeed were rather encouraged than otherwise at Kildeer, for Mr. Hallam did not share in the popular belief that they are exceedingly destructive. He was of opinion that they did far more good than

evil. So they were permitted to build almost anywhere they pleased—in trees, on the rose-bushes that climbed high over the gable of the old house, and even in the eaves under the thatch of the outbuildings.

Of a winter's morning they always had their gift of crumbs, and when the snow was very deep a small sheaf of oats would be tied on a pole for them; and it was a sight to see them clustering round it.

On many a stormy day Lilly might have been seen standing in the court-yard, with the snow falling fast and thick around her, feeding the birds. There would usually be about thirty to forty sparrows, with one or two blackbirds, thrushes and chaffinches. Also Cock-robin himself, with, mayhap,*a grown-up son, who, his father seemed to think, ought long ago to have attached himself to some other farm. They used to sing defiance at each other, then the father would pick up a piece of bread or potato and, rushing towards the prodigal, ram it down his throat.

“Here, then,” he would seem to say, “swallow that and be off with you, and don’t let me see your face again to-day.”

Sometimes an old rook would come down and beg for a big crust, which it is needless to add he always received.

Well, another egg came next morning, and one the next. Fred had taken them away one by one as they came, but on the fourth morning the three were put back and the hen was allowed to sit.

The husband was kinder now than ever to his little wife, and would have fed her continually all day long if she could have taken the food. So in the intervals he had to content himself with singing her a pretty little song, expressive of all the joys that are in this beautiful world of ours, and of his own happiness in particular.

But when at last—that is, after thirteen days—the young birds appeared, why, the cage seemed hardly big enough to contain the proud papa. Of course Fred must rush wildly away to bring Lilly to see the fresh arrivals, and she must go into raptures over them. But they were not much to look at, being for all the world, as a friend of mine expresses it, like a bunch of hairy caterpillars.

Fred made some little change now in the egg-food, giving now and then grated egg mixed with crushed hemp-seed instead of the stale bread, or giving one sort one day and the other the next. From being like caterpillars they soon turned into plump little balls of fluff. They grew and flourished, and from flapping their tiny wings when being fed, began to look very wise, and one fine morning ventured forth to see the world.

Not a very long time after this the mother thought she would like to speculate in another nest, and it was now that Fred was able to appreciate the benefits of the German cage. For the young ones had still to be fed, and instead of attaching what is called a nursing-

cage outside the large one, he simply inserted the wire partition again, thus confining the young to the smaller compartment. The mother then had a new nest in the large room and recommenced her duties.

But the father had little time for his own amusement now, for not only had he to feed his wife on her nest, but the young ones through the bars. However, in course of time these were able to pick crushed seeds, and finally they were removed to a cage by themselves.

And so the fun went on.

Fred was moderately successful with his birds one way or another, though it must not be imagined that he did not meet with many trials and disappointments. But he had a book to consult, a note-book in which to write down all his experiences, good or bad, and also, on Fridays, his friend Duncan to consult, so he was not so badly off.

He still made a few cages in his spare time; but as he was studying very hard, he found it a better plan on the whole to buy cheap cages and ornament them, painting some parts, and gilding and decorating others in a rustic way.

His bazaar at the market-place had become quite noted now, and his clients were many and appreciative.

Fred's pretty little cages containing mice, guinea-pigs, or birds made such charming gifts for young people. That was one secret of his success. But I think that another depended upon the fact that Fred, though

a manly boy, was both modest and unassuming—indeed he was a gentleman at heart. And if I mistake not, a gentleman means a *gentle man*.





CHAPTER XXI.

A DELIGHTFUL HOME FOR PIGEONS—FRED'S SUCCESS— A GIFT FOR LILLY—FRED IS HEADSTRONG.

IT would have been strange indeed if Fred—who really appeared to be a naturalist born, although as yet he had not studied any system—had not kept pigeons.

Indeed there always had been a few blue rocks and ordinary farm-stock birds that lived in an old tower near by and fed with the fowls; but Fred determined to try something a shade better than these.

His first venture was a dove-cot. It was really a pretty contrivance, erected on a pole, with wire-work some distance beneath to keep midnight-prowling cats at bay, and was made out of a small beer-cask, with pigeon-holes in it and shelves outside. It was nicely painted of a bright-green colour, the hoops black, and was admired by all who saw it.

Fred had it erected on one of the lawns in front of his cottage, and he stocked it with two pairs of young squeakers, fantails being his choice.

“You are right, by boy,” Duncan had told him;

"fadtails will do fide. They are dice birds and boddie birds, and wod't fly far away."

Contrary to the custom that holds good as regards pigeon, or dove cots as they are called, Fred had his fantails' house cleared out and cleaned out periodically, and for this reason I feel sure the birds were doubly healthy. But how very few owners of dove-cots ever think of taking a ladder and having a peep inside. If they did they would usually find a state of matters that required a deal of seeing to.

Even from his fantails Fred gained a good deal of experience as to the habits of life and the tricks and manners of pigeons. He learned to love these beautiful and gentle birds at all events, so it was no wonder that he made up his mind to keep some of the more valuable sorts and endeavour to make his hobby pay. But once he thought he had better consult his mentor, Duncan.

"Hullo, Duncan!" he cried, bursting into ~~that~~ worthy man's emporium one Friday forenoon, but stopping near the doorway to pat a fox-terrier; "hullo! I hope you're well this morning. Glad to hear it. Yes, I'm famous, and the fantails are flourishing. And what do you think I'm going to do?"

"I dod't kdow, Fred, by boy."

"I'm going to go in wholesale for fancy pigeons."

"Doa, doa, by boy, you wod't do adythig of the sort."

I won't?"

"You wod't. I dod't advise you, dor by Bary wod't advise a step so rash."

"Na, na, Freddy," said Mary, "ye maun gain experience first. Ye ken fat the auld proverb says: 'Experience teaches feels.'"

"But, Mary, I have experience. The fantails, you know."

Mary laughed, and so did her father.

"Fadtails in a dove-cot are dothing," said the latter.

Fred's face fell. "It is now March again," said he, still protesting, "and father has given me the little loft above the byre, with a nice ladder to reach it from the outside, and a doorway to it and all."

"Dow, by lad, I dod't wadt to discourage you, but I like you as well as by owd sod (son), and by advice is to go id for tubblers first."

"Tumblers?"

"That's it. And now cobe idside by parlour and have a dridk of spruce ale. By Bary bade the ale, and it wod't go to your head."

Inside went Fred; the spruce ale was duly brought, and while they discussed it, Duncan gave his young friend all sorts of good advice, and Fred went straight home that day thanking his stars that he had so good an adviser as honest old Duncan.

He had told him how to prepare the loft first, and how to feed and treat the birds so as to be successful.

Fred had been studying very assiduously lately, and his father was really very glad when he intimated his

purpose of taking a week off. He gladly allowed him to have Borlem for four hours a day.

Borlem was now a sturdy young rascal, and, thanks to Lilly's tuition, had developed considerable talent. He still attended school, though it must be confessed that on fine days his attention used to wander at times.

For instance, when learning his geographical lesson one day he burst out with the following remark:

"Paris the capital of France. Rome the— O, loshie! look, Miss Lilly, there's Gibbie comin' up the walk wi' a fine young wild rabbit in his moo!"

Another day when reading his Bible lesson he read a portion thus: "And Moses spake unto the children of Israel, saying—Heigho! what a bonnie day! wouldn't I like to be doon the burn catchin' troots!"

"Now, then, Borlem," said Fred, "you are not going to school again for a whole week. And I've closed my Homer and Juvenal for the same period of time."

"Hurrah!" cried Borlem, throwing his bonnet up in the air. "That's good news."

"But we've got to work."

"O, that's naething."

"Well, do you see that big roll of wire netting. It only cost threepence a square yard. Some of it is to mend the rabbit court and cavy yard, but most of it is going up yonder to form an aviary in front of the pigeon loft."

"Ah!" said Borlem, "so you're goin' to keep doos, are ye?"

"Yes, I'm going to keep doos. And now to start work. Get all the tools you can think of, and a few more, and we'll begin at once."

Now the door of the loft which Fred had become proprietor of was at no great height from the ground —about twelve feet perhaps; but as this was the only entrance, and the aviary must be built in front of it, the floor of the latter would require to be strong enough to bear a man's weight. So Sandie was consulted.

"There's only ae wye o' managin' matters," said that worthy. "Ye maun place four strong posts here, as if you were biggin' (building) a porch, and lay a wooden fleer (floor) o'er that on a level wi' the loft. D'ye understand?"

"Yes, yes."

"And then big your aviary on top o' your pletform, and as high as the door. Weel, I'll help ye."

"Capital!" cried Fred, rubbing his hands gleefully, as he thought of the nice place he was to build, and already in imagination saw it inhabited by pigeons as lovely as dreams.

"Capital, Sandie! I'm glad I consulted you. Two heads are better than one."

"Especially sheepies' heads," said Torlath the collie, with a sly look up at his master. For Torlath often dined off sheep's head on a Sunday.

Nice sturdy larch posts were now chosen from the wood and trimmed. Next day they were in position,

and sturdy flat planks nailed from one to the other, and now on these Fred commenced to lay his floor. This done the aviary framework was begun, leaving, of course, space at the south side for the doorway. In two days' time this was got up, on the third the door was made and hinged on, opening to the inside, as did the door of the loft itself.

Why, the place already looked complete, and the floor and posts beneath were strong enough to have supported an ox. But although the loft had a southern exposure, it needed to be protected from cutting east winds, so this side of the aviary, with a portion of the roof and two feet of the adjoining side, were covered with old sacking, nailed carefully on and finally tarred.

A capital arrangement indeed, for the birds would thus not only be guarded from the cold, but would have a protection from the strong summer sun also, when they chose to avail themselves of it.

Fred and Borlem now turned their attention to the interior of the loft. Hay and straw had been kept here, and the whole place was dusty in the extreme. However, a stout heart to a stiff brae, said Fred cheerfully, and they took off their coats. The besom was first put to work, then the scrubbing-brush, with plenty of a good disinfectant in the last water.

There was a window in the roof, for the place had once been used as a man's sleeping apartment.

"I'm glad of that," said Fred, pointing to what

Borlem called the "wee winnock," "for," he added, "Duncan assures me, and I can well believe it, that pigeons won't thrive without light. I am going to put windows even in the doorway yonder. There is plenty of old glass about, putty we can make, and we have, thanks to good old dad, any amount of nice tools."

Having fairly and completely cleaned and disinfected the loft, the next thing was to fill up some mice holes they had discovered, and to get up boxes to put in one corner to hold grains. Hoppers for food were then put down, and fountains for drinking water, all of patterns that would prevent the birds from soiling either their grains or their water.

Here and there around the walls, but *not* under perches, were placed nesting-shelves. They were covered over, but were open at the front, and on these were put easily made, L-shaped, rectangular screens, behind which nesting-pans were placed.

Earthenware nesting-pans are probably as good as any, though before he was a great deal older Fred found out that some of his pets despised both the shelves and pans, and preferred a rubbly sort of nest in a quiet corner of the floor. In such cases it is well to let the birds have it all their own way. Who knows that in such matters the birds themselves are not the best judges?

"Reason raise o'er instinct *as you can,*
In this 'tis God directs, in that 'tis man."

The perches were so positioned that nothing below could be soiled, and they were just thick enough for comfort—no thicker and no thinner.

A bath was placed on the floor of the aviary. It was simply an old milk basin, such as is used in the dairy, and Fred had borrowed it from Jeannie.

The floor was covered with nice clean gravel, for, as Fred explained to Borlem, "birds have no teeth."

"Some o' them can bite pretty weel for a' that," said Borlem.

"They have no teeth," continued Fred, "so they bolt their food, chiefly grains, and if they had not a strong gizzard, and did not swallow stony gravel to grind up the food, they would soon die."

"The only thing that now remains to be done," said Fred, looking profoundly wise, "is to make a salt-cat. They won't thrive without salt-cat."

"Weel," Borlem said, "I'm gey fond o' saut beef mysel' when it comes ma road, but I never heard tell o' saut cat afore. An' I've heard o' a cat eatin' a pigeon, but for a pigeon to eat a cat is something new in the news."

But Fred soon enlightened his faithful servant, and showed him what salt-cat meant. It was simply a digestive or stimulating mixture of old lime from walls, gravel, and rough salt, well mixed and draggled with water.

When this was placed in a half-covered box and put in a handy corner, and when shovel, besom, and

rake were put in another, lo! the loft was complete and ready to receive the tumblers.

"By and by," added Fred as he was about to leave, "I shall partition off part of the loft for the young pigeons, so that they sha'n't annoy the parents."

In another week Fred and Borlem enjoyed the delight of seeing the loft stocked with a pair of lovely broad-backed tumblers, one pair of dark slate-coloured, and another pair mottled. They were very lovely, spindle-beaked, with hardly any wattle, beautiful in eye, round in head, full in breast, and short and clean in legs. Duncan assured the boy they were well up in points, though, perhaps, not perfect, and that although they might not be good enough to win first prize at a show, they came of a high-flying and good tumbling strain.

These first pairs seemed to appreciate the benefits of their new and delightful home, and although they were not allowed their liberty except in the aviary, they were perfectly happy.

But before the summer was over Fred's loft was full enough of young pigeons.

Borlem attended to the wants of the pigeons, and Fred never had a fault to find with his management. For the boy's guidance his young master had written out the following rules in big text on a large card, and nailed it up in front of the work bench in the cottage. The rules are really of very great value, though simple and easily remembered.

I. In summer the old pigeons feed the squeakers with what is called pigeon-milk, which they produce from their stomachs, and is really the half-digested or peptonized grains. These grains, therefore, should be fresh and not old and hard, and wheat of good quality ought to form a large proportion of them.

II. Let the grains, whether in winter or summer, be sound and free from dust and worm-holes.

III. Best food: tick-beans, gray peas, maize, wheat, rice, dari, tares, and buckwheat.

IV. Green food daily.

V. Clean water daily.

VI. Bath water daily in summer.

VII. Salt-cat when wanted.

VIII. Keep hoppers always full, because pigeons eat early in the morning.

IX. Cleanliness, regularity, and quiet.

Fred was successful in getting up a glorious little flight of tumblers at last. He did not, however, let them be always out, and he was careful to weed from them such birds as were either too lazy or too weak to fly well. He used to let them out for a fly before breakfast; they returned to be fed, and were then prisoners until the afternoon.

But what a sight it was to see those lovely creatures start tumbling and wheeling in the air, yet keeping close together, and going away and away and away till at last they were no larger to appearance than the larks that fan the snow-white clouds in spring and summer!

Pouters were Fred's next fancy. But the lad was really ambitious, nor do I blame him.

Ambition is no crime even in a boy, so long as it is free from selfishness and tempered by common sense. So, boys, aspire.

"Higher, higher, ever higher;
Let the watchword be Aspire,
Noble Christian youth.
Whatsoe'er be Heaven's behest,
Try to do that duty best,
In the strength of Truth."

After he had kept pouters and tumblers well, Duncan catechized him well one day as to his experience, and his replies were so replete with knowledge of pigeon life, that his mentor pronounced him worthy of owning any breed in the world, even the beautiful archangel or the wondrous fire-pigeon itself, whose metallic lustre, says Neumeister, is so intense that in the sunshine it not only reflects but irradiates, and has a sheen like red and burnished copper.

So Fred sold his pouters and—though sorry to part with them—even his tumblers, and had a select new stock of the more beautiful and delicate breeds.

He took such pains with these, and studied their points and properties so thoroughly, that success was his guerdon.

"I won't stop," he told Borlem, "till I get to the top of the tree."

Well, it so happened that a pigeon show was to take

place in Aberdeen, and Fred, without telling Lilly, boldly entered a pen of magpies and one of turbits.

Borlem and he were going for a little holiday, that was all that Lilly, much to her surprise, got out of her brother.

But, lo, and behold! Borlem and Fred returned next day wild with glee. Both pens had taken prizes—one a first and the other a third.

Fowls had been shown at this exhibition as well as pigeons, and as a gift for Lilly Fred bought a charming pair of Sebright bantams, a cock and hen, and next day, with Borlem's assistance, constructed a fairy-like fowl-house and a fairy-like run for them, and stationed it on the lawn; and I am not certain whether Lilly was not quite as proud of her bantams as the bantams were of themselves, for the little saucy imps evidently thought that everything in the world belonged to them and to them alone.

But after winning so well at the show, Fred found that he had all at once become a kind of authority in the pigeon world, and after this he had really no difficulty in selling his prize-bred stock for good prices.

So upon the whole he made more out of his loft than he did out of his rabbit court.

Was Fred getting rich? O, dear, no! but he had already not only saved a few pounds, but gained great experience in the ways of the world, and had come to know the value of integrity and conscientiousness in all matters of business.

Moreover, if Fred's father had not encouraged his having hobbies, would he not have been just as likely as any other boy to have taken to idle habits and idle dreaming, and so never have discovered the virtue that lies in honest manly labour? The answer is, yes; for with all his good points Fred was somewhat headstrong, though this trait in his character was usually latent. A proof of this is given in next chapter. Would success be the rock ahead of him?





CHAPTER XXII.

MISFORTUNE IN THE LOFT—THE WORST WAS TO COME
—PIGGIE'S DEATH—“KEEP UP YOUR HEART, LAD;
NEVER DESPAIR.”

I'VE been thinking, Lilly,” said Fred one morning to his sister.

“Have you?” said Lilly.

“Don't interrupt, Lill. I'm in earnest. I have been thinking it wouldn't be half a bad plan for me to keep a pig.”

“Fred, that is hardly a gentleman's hobby.”

“Ah! but, Lilly, if I'm to be a farmer I must not expect always to wear a tall hat and carry a silk umbrella. Besides, it is best to begin at the bottom rung of the ladder, you know.”

“Yes-s,” said Lilly, somewhat doubtfully.

“Well, Mr. Stewart has a splendidly-bred sow he wants to sell, and there will be baby pigs in a month or two. O, I've figured it all up, and do you know how much money I shall make by the animal in one year?”

“No, Fred. I love mice and bantams, but I don't think I'd care for pigs, except guineas.”

"Just £9, Lilly. Fancy all that money! And she will only cost me £4. Fancy that again!"

Lilly, however, refused to be much impressed, so Fred went to his father for comfort.

"You may have the empty sty, lad," he answered, "but—"

"But what, father?"

"I think you're too sanguine."

"Not a bit of it, pardon me. I see my way as clearly as I see daylight."

So Fred and Borlem thoroughly cleaned the empty stall or sty; they even disinfected it, and so convinced was this young financier of the correctness of all his calculations, that he refused to have bedding-straw from his father without paying the market price.

Well, piggie was bought and piggie came home, and if any piggie in the world had cause to be happy it was Fred's. Her trough was always filled with the best of food, and when tired of eating she could lie on a bed of the nicest of dry ferns mixed with straw. No wonder she grunted with satisfaction when the boy stroked her; no wonder she snored so loud when she fell asleep.

It seemed as if Fred could never tire looking at her. Indeed, he made a pet of piggie, albeit he had bought her as a mere speculation. He even brought her apples home on a Friday, and gave her many other luscious titbits besides. All this was right enough, and I feel convinced that piggie was by no means

ungrateful. Still there is no getting away from the fact that often, as he leant over her stall, Fred was building castles in the air, quite as silly as those of the man with the basket of crockery-ware whose story was told in our first chapter.

It really is a bad plan to have all one's crockery in one basket, or all one's eggs either, and having too many irons in the fire, one is apt to neglect some of them if not to lose all.

Very recently Fred had invested a considerable slice of his savings in purchasing some fancy pigeons of famous pedigree and strain, and it was concerning these that one morning Borlem came with a very long face indeed to consult his young master.

"O, sir," he cried, "I'm nearly fleggit (frightened) oot o' ma wits!"

"Well, Borlem, you do look a little white. Nothing wrong with the rabbits, I hope?"

"Waur (worse) than that."

"The piggie?"

"Waur than that."

Fred was now fairly roused.

"You don't mean to say—"

"But I do mean to say, sir, that baith the Belgian homers are crumpled-up-like, and I'm fear't that they'll dee."

Fred hurried away towards the loft. He almost flew up the ladder. Then he opened the door and entered with a beating heart. Yes, it was only too

true. Both his lovely homers or carrying-pigeons were moping in a dark corner, and almost at a single glance he could tell that they were attacked by a fatal and infectious form of inflammation.

Both Lilly and Fred had their work cut out that day—it was Thursday. The birds were put in a warm hospital pen, and placed before the fire. Laudanum-and-chalk mixture was administered, and they seemed a little better. Pigeons, however, are the most unsatisfactory patients in the world; and when Fred, with a heavy heart, started with Jeannie next morning for the distant city, there was very little hope indeed of the Belgian voyageurs.

Fred could have cried with vexation, not to say grief, for apart from the loss that their death would cause him, he did not like to see the poor things in their silent suffering.

As soon as his duties were over in town he hurried away to Duncan's shop, and told his tale to sympathetic ears.

Duncan considered for a short time. Then he said:

"We bust get to the root of the ailbedt—to the cause of the trouble. Was there any deglect on the part of Borleb?"

"No neglect. Borlem is worth his weight in gold. We have light, cleanliness, and ventilation in the loft, and we feed and treat on scientific principles."

"Sciedtific pridciples, eh?" said Duncan, shoving his

glasses up over his brow. "You'g bad," he added, "tell be this: what is the size of your loft?"

Fred told him.

"And how bady birds have you?"

Fred saw now what the questions were tending to, and blushed to the roots of his hair.

"Yes," he answered boldly nevertheless; "I have overstocked my loft, and now I must suffer for it."

"Sciedtific pridciples, eh? I tell you what, by boy, of all the bistakes a pidgeod fadcier cad bake, over-crowdi'g is the worst. Go hobe and weed out, and kill or sell your overplus."

"There is a law in dature," continued Duncan, "that the poisods gederated by overcrowdi'g kill off the adibals that gederate those poisods. If it wasd't for this the world itself would be overstocked. Go hobe, dear boy. Old Dudcad feels for you. But the lessod you've leard't wod't be lost od you. Good-bye! Cobe and see be dext week."

Fred did come and see his friend next week, and a woeful tale he had to tell. All his best pigeons were dead and buried; the others he had hospitalled, and the loft was being thoroughly cleaned and disinfected with burning sulphur, carbolic acid, and chloride of lime.

"Poor boy," said Duncan, "I feel for you, and so I'b sure does by Bary."

"O," said Mary with the tears in her eyes, "I could greet (cry) my een oot o' my head! but oh, Freddy, it was a' your ain wyte (fault)!"

"Well, yes, Mary, and I'll really try and do better next, if ever I'm rich enough to go into pigeons again. And I've great hopes that I'll do well with my piggie."

"When do the baby piggies come?" asked Mary.

"Next week, I think, Mary."

"Weel," said Mary innocently, "I'll pray for you and them ilka nicht afore I gang to bed."

"Thank you, Mary, and thank you, Mr. Duncan. You have both been kind friends."

"Cobe idto the parlour, by boy, a'd have sobe dice spruce beer. Dever you let dowd your heart, boy. Dode of us should trouble too buch about this world's affairs. Doa, doa!"

Fred had his drop of spruce, and much more good and unworldly advice, and departed considerably comforted.

"I think," he told Jeannie that evening as they rode home together in the spring-cart, "that the worst is over."

But, alas! the worst was to come.

Winter set in very early this year, although it did not last even throughout December. But a snow-storm came on about the end of October, and the frost was so intense that even the Don itself was frozen all along its banks. The branches of the spruce pine trees pointed groundwards with their load of snow, and the wind at night soughed drearily through the dark Scotch

firs, as Fred one Friday evening made the best of his way homewards from the station. He had reached the turning of the road. The old pony almost stuck in a wreath of snow, and it was only after all hands had dismounted that the hardy little horse succeeded in getting clear.

Chicker—chicker—chicker.

It was a solitary magpie, and it sat on the stone fence right ahead of the cart, nodding its head every time it emitted a sound.

“Look at the piet!” cried Jeannie. “I hope a’body is weel at hame; but I dinna like they birds—I dinna like them.”

“Don’t be superstitious, Jeannie,” said Fred; but his heart gave an uneasy kind of a thud nevertheless. And when the bird, instead of flying right away, merely flew on ahead and recommenced its chickering, Fred began to feel very uneasy indeed.

The bird behaved in this way all the rest of the road. Perhaps the poor thing was merely cold and hungry, and was begging for food in the only way it knew how to.

The first to meet the cart was Borlem, and he looked far indeed from happy.

“What now?” cried Fred, jumping down, “for I can see by your face that something has happened.”

“O, the piggie, sir!” moaned Borlem.

“The piggie! Not dead?”

“Ow, na, sir. But, poor auld thing, she is warstling

on her side, and it is unco little food has crossed her craig (neck) this day."

Fred had hardly stayed to hear the conclusion of this sentence, but hurried straight away to piggie's sty.

As a general rule piggie had always a welcome for Fred when he went to see her, and when he scratched her neck she evinced her gratitude by indulging in a sort of hippopotamus gallop round and round the stall, disappearing for a minute now and then into her sleeping apartment, only to issue out the next with her eyes as brimful of glee as ever a pig's could be. Some people say that pigs have no cleverness, and show but little affection. My experience runs in quite a different groove, and so did Fred's.

But now here was the pet he put so much store by *hors de combat* in her stall. She gave him a look of recognition, and omitted a sound that was more of a moan than a grunt.

Fred knelt beside her and scratched her neck. She turned up the white of her eye in an almost human way.

"O, dear!" she seemed to say, "I'm afraid it is all up with your poor piggie."

"Oh, piggie, piggie, you musn't die! I shall run and get you a drink."

From a prescription that Sandie had great faith in, they composed a warm, soothing drink for the animal. But they had to pour it down her throat.

"I think," said Sandie, "she'll sleep now; but we better leave her quiet onyway."

"D'ye think," said Fred, "d'ye think, Sandie, she will—that she—will live?"

"Man, Fred, I dinna think it possible. But gang inside and tak' your supper, and dinna let doon your heart. That is the warst thing onybody can do."

• • • • •
Fred's spirits were very low to-night. Financial ruin seemed to stare him in the face, all the world looked dark to him, hardly a ray of hope anywhere.

Long after his sister had gone upstairs and curled herself up in her cot—poor innocent wee soul, she had not forgotten to pray even for piggie—Fred must get up from the fireside, take the lantern, and go out.

"Where are you off to, lad?" said his father, taking the pipe from his mouth.

"Only going to have one more look at the piggie, father."

"Do put something round your neck, dear," said his mother; "it is a bitter night out of doors."

"I sha'n't take any hurt," answered Fred, standing in the half-open doorway. "It is a clear starry night now, and the wind has gone down."

So he re-trimmed the light and went out.

The stars were really very brilliant and very near-looking overhead, only there were none close over the hills and woods, for all along the horizon was a frosty mist, up through which a yellow moon was struggling.

Fred strode on over the ground from which the snow had been wind-wafted, and little frozen pools crackled under his feet like glass or egg-shell china.

He listened at Piggie's gate, but all was silent; so he pushed it open and turned the light on her prostrate form.

There were oceans of dry straw here, and he covered her carefully up, all except the head, while the poor thing grunted her thanks once more, showing the white of her human-like eye as she did so. Everything was clean and sweet here, so he sat down beside his favourite for a while, and listened to her regular but somewhat laboured breathing. Then he felt her ears, but they were very cold indeed.

"I hope," said Fred aloud, "she'll be better in the morning.

"Umph!" said Piggie, and that might have meant anything.

As he could do no further good he refastened the door, and stole away on tiptoe, pleased, at anyrate, that he had seen her and covered her up.

He was down next morning early, before even the sun had risen. He hurried away to the sty. One glance was sufficient. Poor Piggie" was cold enough and stiff enough now. She would never "grumph" any more. Fred somehow could not help noticing every detail, that, for instance, her eyes were half-open, and that the straws she last had breathed upon, were frozen white and hard

He heaved a sigh and went away to communicate the sad tidings to Sandie.

"Man," said Sandie, "it's you I'm sorry for; as to the piggie, she's weel oot o' a weary warld. 'But, losh! we'll have a job to bury her," he added.

"Picks and spades will do it," said Fred. "Have Joe to help you, and start at once, for I want to have her underground before sister awakes."

"A' richt!" said Sandie.

Down in the old orchard at the foot of a pine tree the grave was dug. For fully a foot the ground was like adamant. Then it softened, and the work went speedily on.

Piggie was buried among straw. Although only a pig, she had been so fond of Fred, and he could not think of laying her in the cold ground, and that was the reason straw was used.

Strange to say, now that all was over, the resiliency of Fred's spirits began to show itself, and he was not so utterly cast down as he had expected to be. Somehow or other the worst of his troubles seemed to be over, and things might now grow brighter.

"O!" said Lilly when she came in to breakfast, "I know from your face that piggie is dead."

Then, girl-like, she burst into tears.

It was late on this same Saturday afternoon ere Fred found himself at old Donald's shieling. He would not

permit his sister to accompany him, only Torlath and Gael.

The old man was sitting in the dark, but he renewed the fire and made a cheerful blaze, when he heard the boy's voice.

"I hardly expected you to-night," he said; "but sit you down and give me all the news. I'll lower the kettle and light the lamp, and we'll soon have a cup of tea."

Torlath and Gael sat down side by side to look at the fire, starting a little now and then, as dogs do when a piece of wood crackled more loudly than usual or a peat flared up into a blaze.

Fred told old Donald all his troubles, and received genuine sympathy and right good advice.

"So you see, laddie," said Donald at last, "that though the loss of the pigeons was your own fault, I look upon the death of your pig as somewhat of a punishment, because you had taken to thinking too much of the world and worldly riches."

"But keep up your heart, lad. Never despair, as we used to say at sea, on many a dark and stormy night."

So, tea discussed, Fred bade the old man good-night and went away home through the snow, feeling far more calm and easy in mind, than he had done when he started.

After supper, when the boy pulled down a volume of one of his favourite poets, he thought it somewhat

remarkable that the very first words which caught his eye were as follows:—

“Never give up! it is wiser and better
Always to hope, than once to despair,
So, fling off the load of Doubt’s heavy fetter,
And break the dark spell of tyrannical Care.

Never give up! for the wisest is boldest,
Knowing that Providence mingles the cup,
And of all maxims, the best and the oldest
Is that truest of watchwords: Never give up!”

Fred put away the book. *He did not read anything else that might drive that good old watchword out of his memory.

And as he fell asleep that night his last words to himself were: “Never give up!”





CHAPTER XXIII.

“OH! FREDDY,” SHE SOBBED, “YOU'RE ALL I HAVE IN THE WORLD NOW.”

FRED did not give up. The morning brought him hope, as it usually does, to youth at all events, and he began to think and plan how he might retrieve his fortunes.

He could not hide from himself the fact that he had been rash in his speculations, and that castles in the air are about the most unsatisfactory and unstable edifices one could possibly live in.

Sandie's advice to him was not bad, albeit it was couched in broad Scotch.

“Ye maun ca' canny for a while;” which means in plain English, that for some time to come Fred must drive slowly.

“I'll never count my chickens again, Sandie,” Fred replied, “until they are hatched.”

“Man!” said Sandie, “I'll tell ye a better plan than even that.”

“Well?”

“Neyer count your chickens till they've grown into good big sonsy hens, and are safe awa' to the market.”

Fred laughed.

“Ye needna lauch, Freddy,” quoth Sandie; “what I’m tellin’ ye is gweed (good) auld mitherly common sense.”

“All right, Sandie! Everyone is so kind and gives me the best of advice, only I’m such a fool I can’t take it. Heigho!”

“Weel, weel, there should be nae ‘Heigho!’ about the maitter. I never saw muckle eese (use) in cryin’ o’er spilt milk. You’re nae ruined yet.”

Fred’s eyes brightened somewhat. “No,” he replied, “I’ve ten pounds in the Savings Bank.”

“What a lot o’ siller!”

“And my father has been so kind over this affair. He thinks I might make something out of fowls, and has turned over the whole run to me. - And I’m going to do something, I can assure you.”

“Weel, weel; only dinna forget my motto whatever ye dae—‘Ca’ canny.’”

When Fred took over the fowl run, as a reward, his father said, for his energy in helping on the farm, it was in a fairly flourishing condition, and owing to the care that was taken in the matters of housing, feeding, and cleanliness, plenty eggs were obtained not only for the table but to sell on Fridays.

But Fred now thoroughly overhauled the whole place and went in heavily for improvements. He discovered many a little flaw in the house itself. The snow had shown leaks, for instance, and spaces that had been left for the purposes of ventilation had degenerated into draught-holes. This would not do, so, stormy though the weather was, Borlem and he went to work like

men, mended the thatch, adopted a better system of ventilation, renewed and protected the dust-bath, thoroughly cleaned the whole place, scraping even the perches, and renewed the straw in the nests.

He gave Borlem orders, too, that he should throw garden refuse, cabbage leaves, &c., into the run, and scatter oats now and then broadcast over this heap, so that in looking for the grains the birds might have exercise.

This was a capital plan, and the fowls, instead of huddling all together in a drooping-tailed pitiful mob in their houses, were at work nearly all daylight. The hens grew brighter in eye and redder about the gills, and the cocks strutted about like Highland pipers and crew loud and strong both morn and eve.

Table scraps and bits of boiled bullock's lights were given to the laying fowls, and the egg produce was increased to a considerable degree.

Of course, as Fred would now have all the profits, he had to pay for the food, but this he cheerfully did.

He did something else besides. He carefully weeded out all "wastrils," such as hens after their second season, who would hardly lay well again, and cockerels he had no use for.

He was determined he should not err a second time on the score of overcrowding.

The snow went away now, and there was every prospect of an open winter. So Fred had the large run divided into three, with three separate very cheaply-knocked-up fowl-houses, and very early in the year he had the satisfaction of having no less than five beauti-

ful broods of chickens. So without actually building aerial castles, he thought he could really look forward to a successful season. He determined that it should not be his fault if success did not crown his efforts.

He should have lordly-looking Langshans, a breed of splendid Asiatic birds, not unlike in shape and size the Cochin, and jet black. A few Brahmans, and several good-laying breeds, such as Hamburghs and Spanish, which Duncan had procured him from birds that were not only prize-winners, but of celebrated egg-producing strain as well. Ah, that was indeed a secret!

But while gladly admitting that Fred actually did exceedingly well with his fowls, it must be remembered, that he did not adopt this hobby without considerable experience in the management of good old-fashioned birds.

Fred really deserved his successes, if only for one reason: he had gone through the fire and had profited by his sad experience.

Far away up Donside, and in the more Highland districts, may be found many very large and lovely specimens of grass snakes, not to mention pretty and active little lizards.

It occurred to Fred one day as he was returning from a fishing excursion with Borlem and Sandie's "craigit heron," that a beautiful and well-filled, though not overcrowded vivarium might produce some profit if placed in his bazaar.

He consulted Duncan on the subject and was rejoiced to find he thought the same.

"Do so by all badder of beads (manner of means)," said Duncan. "I cad get the case bade in a week's tibe, and you cad fill it."

And sure enough next week Duncan had the vivarium case all ready, and it did not cost the boy a great deal either. Moreover, taking this as a pattern, Borlem and he managed to build several others. Give a boy a box of *good* tools, not toys, and if he has any brains at all there is no doubt he will make something nice.

I should not trouble to say anything at all about this vivarium of Fred's, if I did not happen to know that many lads living in far-off country districts, and in the Highlands and islands, would like to know something about this beautiful and interesting drawing-room ornament.

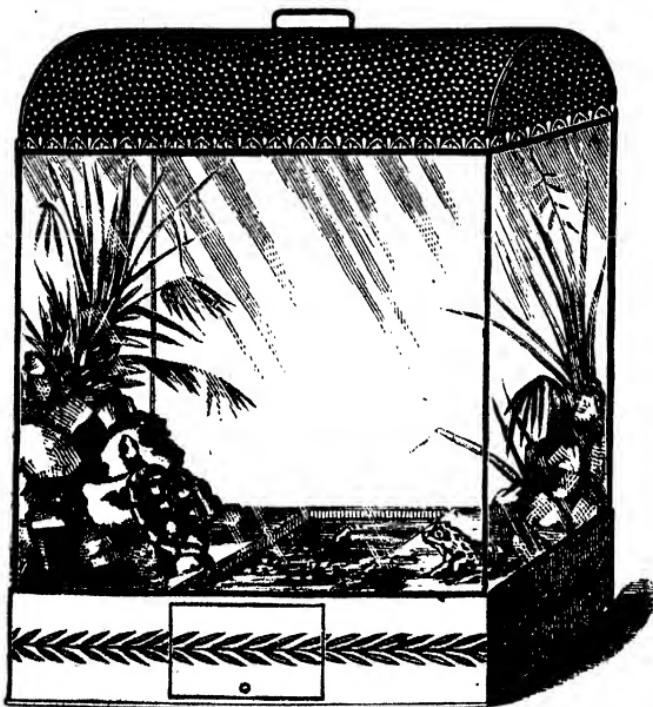
The case then made by Duncan was in size as follows:—Length, twenty-four inches; breadth and height, about eighteen.

All the sides were made of glass, neatly let into strong tin frames, for your reptiles and amphibians dearly love the light.

The bottom was made of finely-perforated zinc in order to keep the earth free from mildew. The lid was also of perforated zinc, and on both the gables between this lid and the sides went a piece of perforated zinc three inches wide. This was for the purpose of thorough ventilation.

On the bottom of this case was placed first a layer of clean gravel, then a layer of sand, and over this a somewhat coarse turf.

The furniture of the case consisted of two rockeries, with ferns growing on them, for the specimens to climb about on, a rough root or two for the creatures to get under when desirous of rest and privacy, and a largish dish of water from which they could drink



or in which they might lie. This dish was of zinc, and let down into and on about a level with the turf and the rockeries.

And now for the inhabitants. One bright, beautiful morning Fred succeeded in catching and bagging a lovely glittering grass-snake. It was fast asleep to all appearances, and he seized it with a pair of long forceps

It was perfectly harmless, but somehow the boy could not muster courage to use his naked or gloved hand.

This snake was king, or queen, if you like, of the vivarium, and quite a show in itself. But it was not long without companions—two or three pretty and agile lizards—not the foreign green lizards; they kill frogs. The lizards were bagged by means of a butterfly-net, and very indignant they were at being treated with so little ceremony; two slow-worms, a small tortoise or two that the boy got from Duncan, and a respectable old toad.

A chameleon might have been added, but this Fred was unable to procure.

So pleased was he with this vivarium, and so interesting were the “tricks and manners” of the inmates, that he could hardly make up his mind to sell it.

He found that the inhabitants of the case were far from regular in their habits as regards feeding. However, he kept their house well supplied with slugs, worms, tiny bits of meat, flies, meal-worms, &c. The big grass-snake, and perhaps the lizards, would have enjoyed little frogs; but to tell the truth, Fred had not the heart to put any in.

The Rowlands had now come back for good to live at The Hall during summer and autumn, the captain having retired. They often paid a visit to Fred's cottage, and many a long delightful day they spent together fishing in the Don or the Kelpie Burn.

Captain Rowland was delighted with Fred's vivarium, and having a *penchant* himself for natural history, he proposed buying it, and did so at a very handsome price.

Fred made a smaller case and filled it with creatures he had mostly bought, such as green tree-frogs, snake-frogs, fire-frogs, newts, salamanders, and toads. He fed these on all sorts of worms, including meal-worms, and placed in the case also many kinds of chrysalids that finally developed into moths and flies, much to the delight of the frogs.

This case he finally disposed of at his bazaar.

* * * * *

Those two lines of asterisks are eloquent, if the reader could read them aright. First and foremost, they give the author time to breath, as it were; and secondly, they mark a period in this quiet and uneventful tale, that may well be called the turning-point in its hero's history.

It was towards the end of the summer of 187—, and just a little over three years since Fred had scored his first success in minor stock-keeping. The corn, mingled with the rich bright crimson of the wild poppy, or the golden glare of blossoming charlock, was still green in the fields around Kildeer; but the rich, sweet hay fell in swaths before the scythe of sturdy Sandie M'Byres.

Some of it which had been cut down days ago, was now fit to throw up into little stalks or "coles" previous to being carted home, and in this corner of the field worked right merrily Mr. Hallam himself, the "orra" man, Jeannie, Borlem, and Fred, while Torlath and Gael did a deal of tumbling among the fragrant hay that assisted in making it. As usual the heron was

there, and as usual standing on one leg fast asleep with the limb of an unhappy frog sticking out of his mouth.

Of late Mr. Hallam's farm had not been paying, and this had caused him considerable anxiety. The dear old pet cow Bellack had died of foot-and-mouth disease, and after that the byres were soon almost emptied of fat-stock.

However, this ex-paymaster, R.N., was not much given to letting down his heart, and as there was ample promise of a good harvest, he looked calmly forward to the future and cheerfully hoped for the best.

On this particular and sad day the sun was unusually hot. One could hardly look at the sky above, so bright was it, nor at the broad surface of the shining river that reflected the rays of light as from a mirror.

Cold water, whey, and butter-milk, however, helped to keep the haymakers cool, and many were the humorous stories Mr. Hallam told to cheer his willing labourers' hearts. For where mirth reigns in a field work is sure to go quickly on.

This good old sailor-farmer had just finished lifting a large forkful of hay on to the top of a cole, when he was seen suddenly to stagger and fall forward on his face.

Fred rushed to his assistance, and turning him round, held him in his strong young arms. The lips were just a little blue, and the face was pale. Fred was able to catch two words—half-whispered they were: “Mercy—Jesus!” Then all was still—for ever still.

Yes, poor Mr. Hallam was dead. Fred knew it, albeit he never had seen death before.

The boy's feelings may hardly be imagined, much less described.

He felt stunned by the blow, though tears were denied him, and Jeannie said afterwards that, as long as she lived, she ne'er should forget the look of Fred's face, as he sat there with his dead father's head pillow'd on his breast.

Sandie ran down from his work, and seeing how matters stood, led the poor boy away homewards by the hand. He went with Sandie quietly enough, though he walked like one in a dream.

The lad never knew how or in what words the terrible news had been broken to his mother and Lilly. In fact, the dazed dream into which he had dropped lasted for days, and the first thing that he afterwards distinctly remembered, was bending over that dark white-lined coffin and crying as if his heart would surely break.

In a grave in the old-fashioned church-yard of Drumdale, down by the banks of the Kelpie Burn, Fred saw his father laid, and helped, as is the Scottish custom, to throw in the first clod of the damp clay-earth.

Then he went slowly homewards with the rest of the mourners, and when he entered the parlour his grief-stricken mother threw herself into his arms.

"O Freddy, Freddy!" she sobbed, "you're all I have in the world now."

Fred placed her quietly down in the easy old chair, and kneeling beside it, caressed her thin white hand.

"God wanted father," he said; "but, mother, I shall be a better son to you now than ever. Your will shall be my law, your wishes mine. Don't weep so, dear mother; don't weep so."



CHAPTER XXIV.

“I’LL DO MY BEST; I CAN BUT FAIL.”

THE kindness of Captain and Mrs. Rowland to the Hallam family, after their sad bereavement, was very touching. Both the lady and her gallant husband knew well that actual words of consolation in such cases are of little use and have but little meaning; but Mrs. Rowland came daily to the farm, and actually assisted Fred's mother in the superintendence of the household duties, while the captain took upon his own shoulders the whole *onus* of legal business, connected with the winding up of affairs at the farm of Kildeer.

In doing so, however, he compelled Fred to assist him, knowing that activity would be the best cure for grief. So the two were together all day long, and even sat working at the books till far into the night.

This was a great saving in legal fees, and probably also saved Mrs. Hallam from being cheated by such human hawks, as never fail to hover around where there is any likelihood of making money.

Alas! though, after the whole estate was wound up, it was found that a heavy balance was due to creditors.

There was nothing for it, therefore, but to put everything to the hammer—farm implements, crops,

and cattle, and even a considerable portion of the household furniture. And when this was done there was but little indeed for the Hallams to recommence life with.

But Captain Rowland put a cheerful face on matters. He told Fred's mother that he was very fond of Fred and Lilly, and would not like them to live very far away from The Hall. He had a cottage and a little croft recently untenanted. There were but four acres of land, to be sure, with a garden, yet the cottage was very nice and substantial. They were welcome to it at a nominal rent. They would really be doing him a favour if they took it; and by and by, when things grew brighter and Fred became a man, they could once more have a larger place.

Mrs. Hallam pressed the captain's hand in silence. She dared not trust herself to speak, but he knew his offer had been accepted.

Long before the autumn tints were on the trees, or even all the yellow grain safely stacked and thatched, the Hallams took possession of the pretty stone-built cottage of Mavisbank. Well might it be called Mavisbank, for throughout all the joyous days of May and June the thrushes sang sweetly in the fir-wood close at hand.

At some distance behind the little cot rose a hill, that at the present moment was bedecked with the glory of the crimson heather, and not far off, and beneath the croft, was a reach of the Don, which at this place seemed to have gone considerably out of its course in order to linger among the bonnie woods.

Altogether the scenery around Mavisbank was charming. The home of the Rowlands, peeping gray over a cloudland of trees, stood on the brae-land not far off, and many a thriving farm could be seen from Mrs. Hallam's little parlour window.

Yes; the cottage was small, consisting of but six rooms, but the lower windows abutted bay-fashion on to the garden and were covered with trailing roses; so also was the porch before the door.

Old Donald's shieling was not a great way off, and as soon as the new residents got settled he came over to see them, arrayed in his Sunday's best. And much good advice had he to give both Mrs. Hallam and Fred.

Lilly and her brother kept up their habit of going to see old Donald as regularly as Saturday itself came round. They always found him the same, living his quiet and uneventful life, at peace with Heaven and with all men.

"Yes," he told Fred once, "I enjoy life very much. I come of a very long-lived stock, and may be spared for many years yet to come. But when it is His will I am ready to go. Yes, laddie, I am willing to go, or willing to stay on earth a little longer."

Fred could not help admiring in his own mind this peaceful resignation. Surely, indeed, this was an example of what is called "the beauty of holiness." He had seen the same exemplified in the lives of both his father and mother; and it is no wonder that, chastened by grief as he now was, he began to be enamoured of the life of the true Christian.

Fred had never been a bad boy, but probably the

business cares of his little world had prevented him from thinking as much as he would otherwise have done.

One day he went away by himself to the woods, accompanied only by honest Torlath, for it is almost unnecessary to say that the Hallams had not parted with their dogs, nor with the birds either. Willie and Koakie were in a single day as much at home in Mavisbank as they had been at Kildeer, and Gilbert Bruce roamed the woods and wilds with quite as much nonchalance as ever. Fred had not gone to the woods to-day to study nature, but to think. He had a problem to solve and a question to answer, namely, "What shall I be?"

Captain Rowland had hinted something to him about a clerkship that he might be able to procure for him in India, but Fred had all the patriotism inseparable from the Scottish mountaineers. No—he could not, *would* not leave his native land.

Since his father's death his prospects of being a farmer were blighted indeed. Why should he not then turn his liberal education to some advantage and become a teacher? He did not like the prospect. So, when the sun was declining round and red in the purple haze that lay all over the woods, the boy seemed just as far from solving his problem as ever.

But he had not yet finished thinking. Lower and lower sunk the sun, and disappeared at last behind that sea of fog. But the boy never stirred. Pigeons came flapping home from their feast of bilberries, and settled for the night in the trees overhead, a bat or two came out and went zigzagging up and down

through the gloaming air, an owl flew rapidly past betwixt him and the light, making the woods re-echo with his dismal cry, and, hopping over the withered pine needles, came a leveret, pausing when near him, and probably wondering, while it washed its face, what human being he could be who sat there so silently with his back against a tree.

“Somehow,” said Fred to himself, “since I have known old Donald and gone back and fore to his shieling, making those translations for him, my mental life has undergone a change. His quiet companionship has had a strange influence on me, and to a great extent his religious belief has become mine. I seem to see things as he does. Well, I am happy, and I should—yes, I really should like to make others happy in the same way. Why—yes, why should I not try to work my way through the university curriculum and become a clergyman? I could do good to my fellow-creatures then, and what a field I should have, if minister in some country parish, for the study of natural history! No I could never give that up, and really it seems to me that in admiring and loving His works, one is admiring and loving Him.

“I never could be a farmer. I feel that now. I’ve learned business habits, though, from the adoption of my various hobbies, and I have a few pounds saved. Ah! these will help me on. Of course I was somewhat silly to imagine I could make my fortune all out of half-a-crown. Not that such things have not been done. And I shall always keep pets for the love I have learned to bear them.

"But what a struggle is before me! Never mind, I'm no faint heart. I'll try. *I'll do my best; I can but fail.*"

Fred jumped up now and made the best of his way out of the wood, guided by Torlath.

"Not that way, doggie," he said when they found themselves on the hill; "we're going to see old Donald."

As if knowing what was meant, the wise dog trotted on now in front again, but took quite a different direction.

How dark it was getting! And the stars were already shining even in the west. Somehow these stars led the boy's thoughts away to his father. He never could think of him as dead. It might have been called superstition by some, yet he felt and believed that his father could still see him, and that he knew his every thought and action.

"Well," he said, gazing up at one very bright planet, "if father can see me, he cannot, I think, do otherwise than approve of my now firm resolve."

He soon reached Donald's door, and was singing to himself as he opened.

"Come away, laddie, I'm glad to hear your cheerful voice in song once more. It isn't natural for the young to spend life in mourning for those who have gone before. Besides, boy, your dear father has reached a happy shore. No sorrow can come to him where he is now."

"No, sir; I'm sure of that. Well, I've news for you."

Fred then told him in a few brief bold words that he meant to present himself at the annual competition

for bursaries at the University of Aberdeen. That if he were successful he should push through, and in good time take his degree of M.A., and so study for the church.

Old Donald heard the words and his heart rejoiced.

"Indeed, indeed, boy, you have made an old man happy! You have chosen the good part. I'll pray for you, laddie, and so will your lady mother."

When, that same evening, he communicated his intentions to his mother she could not speak for a time; tears chased each other adown her cheeks and dropped upon the stocking she was busy knitting. But they were tears of joy, and by and by she was smiling as she had not smiled before, since the sad morning on which her husband had been borne home a corpse.

It was a busy busy day in the old hall of King's College, Auldtown, Aberdeen, for there no less than eighty young men were assembled to write their versions and compete for bursaries, the highest being thirty pounds a year.

Among them was Fred Hallam, and as he looked around him at the multitude of earnest faces, and faces most of which he thought looked far more intellectual than his, hope of winning a bursary sank almost to zero.

He heaved a sigh, but he went on with his work all the same.

"Nothing venture, nothing win," he thought. Even if unsuccessful he could try again another year.

Professors in their gowns took watch and watch

about, to see that no unfair play took place, or any communication between the students, or the use of cribs.

So the long day began to wane and wear away. Fred took from his pocket some bread and cheese, and quietly made a meal, washed down with a draught of water from a bucket that stood near the doorway.

The gas was lit at last, but by this time the number of the competitors was thinned down to about fifteen. All the rest had gone, many without even handing in their papers. Before long Fred himself was finished, and with anxious heart and trembling hands gave up his work at the receiver's desk. His countenance was critically scanned as he came back by those who still remained, but they learned but little therefrom.

Then Fred hurried away back to his dingy room, and dingy though it was he enjoyed his tea.

It was indeed an anxious group of students and their friends who were assembled in the college quad a few evenings after this, just as gloaming was beginning to merge into night. Here were all sorts and conditions of young men. Hard-working lads from the country—their very dress betokened them such—whose parents would be quite unable to keep them at the university, unless they succeeded in winning a bursary in this momentous annual competition, and who would, if unsuccessful, return home perhaps to labour at the plough again. The sons of well-to-do tradesmen, or little lairds, who had competed with very little hope in their hearts, because they had spent the hours when they should have been studying in recrea-

tion and play. The sons of the wealthy, whose fathers would think it high honour indeed for them to win, but who would refuse to accept the money, letting it go to some poorer students. Hard-working, earnest, studious lads, to whom a bursary meant all and everything, and whose hearts, as they paraded the quad arm in arm, beat high with hope one minute only to be depressed with fear the next. The questions these latter were constantly asking each other as they anxiously compared notes were "How did you render this?" or "How did you translate that?"

Apart by himself, for he knew no one, up and down under the shadow of the wall walked Fred, waiting, waiting, waiting, and O, the time did seem so long!

At last there was a rush, and hushed was every voice as a window in the upper floor was thrown open, and a figure appeared and commenced to call aloud the names of the successful competitors.

"Robert M'Donald, 1st bursar!"

There was a faint cheer, and the lucky Robert forced his way through the crowd, and entered the building to be congratulated by the professors assembled in senate.

"James Plaiston, 2d bursar!"

Happy James went through the same performance as lucky Robert.

"Duncan M'Leod, 3d bursar!"

Then a pause for a few minutes, and poor Fred's heart throbbed wild with joy as he heard the next words.

"A mistake, gentlemen. Frederick Hallam, 3d bursar; Duncan M'Leod is 4th

I feel quite sure that, as he elbowed his way through the crowd, and ran up the stone stairs to the senatus room, Fred could not have told—to use a simple simile—whether his head or his heels were uppermost.

The dignified and gowned professors, who smilingly shook him by the hand, seemed hidden by a fog, and the cheers of the students that greeted his return sounded far far away.

Fred waited to hear no more, but ran right away to the post-office to send a telegram to his mother.

A letter might have done? No, certainly not. Nothing less than a shilling telegram could meet the requirements of the case.

Fred's dreams were, indeed, pleasant ones that night.

He thought he was already the loved and respected minister of a fine old country parish, and that his mother and Lilly sat beneath in the ministerial pew, looking ever so happy as he propounded to his earnest hearers the law divine, and preached his extempore sermon.

He felt a little disappointed when he awoke and found himself lying in that low and darksome attic, with all his life and struggles still before him.

"Ah! well," he said half aloud, "it was a delightfully happy dream! But then it was but a dream. Do dreams, I wonder, e'er come true?"



CHAPTER XXV.

STUDENT LIFE IN ABERDEEN.

THERE was indeed joy in the cottage of Mavisbank on receipt of that brief but delightful telegram. It would be difficult to say which of Fred's relatives or friends was most proud of him—Lilly, his mother, Jeannie, Borlem, or old Donald. The latter, by the way, always spoke of Fred as “our laddie.”

Lilly simply cried for joy.* The widowed mother thanked Heaven.

Jeannie, with a little toss of her head, said: “I kent (knew) richt weel a’ the time that oor Freddy would win a bussry. I only wonder they didna gie him the first.”

Borlem, with both the dogs jumping and barking round him, must allay his feelings by going out into the yard and tossing his broad bonnet three times up into the air, and finally dancing three steps of the Highland Fling right on top of it.

“Bravo! bravo!” cried Willie the starling, who was breaking up a snail on the flags. And Koakie, who was not far away, made a rush at Willie, and tried to pull out his new tail.

When, next day, Fred returned home for a week,

there was not an old wife anywhere near that did not call round to congratulate him; while Sandie, who had been engaged at Captain Rowland's, came all the way from the Hall for the same purpose, with the heron running or hopping at his heels.

Fred and Lilly dined at the Hall the day before the lad went off to the city to join his classes, and as a man of the world the gallant captain gave him much sound advice.

Of course he had gone to visit old Donald, and found him, just as usual, quietly happy and as full of tales of his adventurous past life as ever. He blessed Fred with fervour as he bade him good-bye.

"Surely," thought Fred to himself as Torlath and he set out for home, "surely I ought to be a happy young man, having so many friends that wish me well!"

The position at Mavisbank was at present as follows: —Mrs. Hallam managed to buy and keep two cows on the little croft, and Borlem—now very strong though not tall—with his sister Jeannie as assistant, was chief manager, foreman and bailiff all combined. As, however, ploughing and harrowing would have to be done by hired horses, it was hardly to be expected that this croft of four acres, mostly poor land, could keep all hands comfortably alive.

But then Mrs. Hallam had a pension, or "compassionate allowance," from the Royal Navy. It was but a pittance of some sixty pounds. Nevertheless, by the blessing of Providence, she hoped to make it do, although Fred at college could have but little assistance from home.

Where there is a will there is a way; however, and the lad soon settled down in his far-from-uncomfortable attic. It was in a house five stories high. This was nothing. And stairs are nothing to a mountaineer. Besides, the attic being so high above the street, there was comparative quiet to be had.

How eagerly he counted the little store of money he had saved from his hobbies, studying and planning on paper how far he could make it go.

His attic rent was but three-and-sixpence a week, and for this sum the old widow woman with whom he lodged cooked for him, and attended to his every want in as kindly a manner as if Fred had been her own son.

With rigid economy, then, and with the aid of his bursary-money, which certainly was not much, our hero thought he could manage very well for the first year at all events. Besides, there was the chance of getting some teaching to do.

So he settled down to work hard, and make himself as proficient as possible in the classical languages. His kindly professors could see he was a good student, and he was several times invited out to tea or breakfast in company with others. And very delightful little parties those used to be. The professors were kindly, genial fellows, and knew right well how to make their guests feel perfectly at ease. It must have surprised these good professors, however, to witness the rapidity with which some of the country or Highland students made the morning rolls and buttered toast disappear.

Many of the better class of these youths were capital

conversationalists, and it was a great delight to Fred to listen to the opinions they ventilated, and to the talk generally which went on around the table. He himself preferred the easier plan—he preferred to sit, for the most part silent, to listen and think.

Little oases in the desert of Fred's somewhat lonely life were these mornings or evenings, spent in the beautifully-furnished houses of his professors, for it was two long months before he had made a single acquaintance worthy of the name. Everything in a large city seems very strange to a country-bred lad at first, and beautiful though Aberdeen is by day, and eke by night, Fred would not have given one week spent in his own wild woods for months and months of its artificial glitter and glare. He used to hurry to college of a morning arrayed in his scarlet toga, walking thoughtfully and very often with his head bent down, heedless of the remarks of the passers-by, or the jeers of little boys on whom the sight of the red gown has usually the same effect it would have on a bull.

Classes over for the day, Fred would hurry home again to dine, exchanging perhaps only the most ordinary courtesies with any students that he came in contact with, if he happened to know their faces.

But he had one little friend at home that never failed to give him a hearty welcome, and that was Willie the starling. Fred used to open his cage-door as soon as he came in, and after a few love passages the fun began. The starling would pipe his tunes, and repeat—often in a sadly mixed up sort of way—all the sentences he could think of. Sometimes he would sit

on the back of a chair and deliver a sort of speech somewhat as follows:—

“Who are you? Fred's pretty pet. Fred's darling starling, pretty lump of sugar. Tse, tse, tse. Willie, Willie, Willie. Who are you? Sugar, sugar, lump, darling, starling, pretty bit of bread. Tse, tse, tse. Bravo, Willie! bravo! bravo! You're a rascal, you are, you are, you ARE.”

Not much sense in this speech certainly. Yet many a time and oft have I listened to a worse at a banquet or public dinner.

Dinner over, Willie would be returned to his cage, and the last thing Fred would hear as he started off downstairs was always that doleful “Poo-oor Willie!”

Wet or dry our student never failed now to start off for a good long walk. If it were dark, as it usually was in December and January, he went straight along the road towards the country, then returning spent half an hour or so looking at the shop windows in Union Street—he lived in the New Town—and studying life on the pavement.

Home again now, he would commence work, studying sometimes far into the night, with the starling sound asleep on his head or on his shoulders.

Mrs. Peel, his landlady, always took good care that her lodger was roused betimes in the morning.

Indeed, taking her all in all, I think Fred was lucky in having such a thoughtful body of a landlady. Of somewhat curious appearance was this elderly little dame. Old, and yet not old—she was in years perhaps but fifty—in manners ancient enough. Straight in

back, active as to every movement, her cheeks like roses, her eyes mild and blue, always wearing a white cap with gay ribbons, always wearing her gray hairs in ringlets that hung down 'twixt cheek and ear, such was honest, cleanly Mrs. Peel.

She had a queer, little, daft-looking doggie that followed her like a shadow wherever she went, but was far too fat to walk properly, so he waddled.

Sometimes Darby, as he was called, did Fred the honour of a visit, and graciously accepted a bone or a bit of sugar, but used to be very much astonished and somewhat superstitious when Willie called him a rascal, and emphasized the remark by adding, "You are, you are, you *are*."

Mrs. Peel had no other lodgers, so she made much of our Fred. He had not been a month in her house before she had made the discovery that he really was very poor, and that he hardly, so she thought, had food enough.

It was after this that Fred one day found a nice little rice-pudding—a luxury he would never have thought of ordering—on his table at dinner. It is worthy of remark that the pudding was not whole; a spoonful or two had been taken out of it.

However, Fred summoned his landlady upstairs, by the simple expedient of knocking with his heel on the floor, for there was no bell.

"Mrs. Peel," he said, smiling, "haven't you brought this rice-pudding up by mistake?"

"Toot, toots! No, ye silly laddie. I thocht ye would like it. It's not a whole one, ye see. I had a bit mysel."

"Ah! but, Mrs. Peel, I'm not going to rob you."

"Toots, laddie! Is it no better you should eat it, than it should be thrown into the ash-pit?"

"You wouldn't do that?"

"Deed would I; for I've no fowls and never a pig, and Darby has more to eat than he can wag his tail at, poor fellow."

"Well, well, Mrs. Peel, thank you very much, but really you know—"

"Toot, toots! haud your silly tongue. You're as proud as Punch, laddie."

"Goodness forbid!" said Fred.

After this Fred had many a little tit-bit, which otherwise—so Mrs. Peel said, though I don't believe it—would have been thrown into the ash-pit.

Sometimes Mrs. Peel would come and say to him:

"Fred, laddie"—somehow or other everybody called him by his Christian name—"I'd like a sheep's head and trotters for dinner. Now, it is too much for me and Darby. Will you join?"

"And Fred did. He paid one-third only, because there were three in it—Darby, Mrs. Peel, and himself. He paid one-third, I say, and had to eat far more than the half. But this was, after all, only another of Mrs. Peel's kindly tricks to keep the flesh and blood on poor hard-working Fred's bones.

Once a week Fred took tea with his old friend Duncan, and almost every Sunday evening the naturalist, and sometimes even Mary, took tea with Fred in his attic, and very happy evenings these were, for all three had one thing in common—love of nature.

"Mind you, Mr. Duncan," Fred said once, "I'm not going to give up keeping pets; and if I'm spared to become a man, and am lucky enough to get a church, and a fine old-fashioned manse, I'll keep a regular menagerie on a small scale."

"O," said Mary, "that would be delightful!"

"And you and your father shall come and see me often."

"By dear boy," returned Duncan, "by Bary and I will rejoice to rud out and see your church and your banse (manse) and your little bedagerie."

"Yes, Duncan, and you shall buy my pets for me—birds and beasts."

"What all will you have?" asked Mary.

"O, I couldn't tell you what *all*; but anyhow I mean to have a British and foreign aviary. I shall have an owl and a hawk or two, the cockatoo and Willie the starling, of course."

"Tse, tse, tse," from Willie on hearing his name mentioned.

This sound—tse, tse, tse—by the way, was precisely similar to that which a human being makes when expressing surprise, with the tongue against the upper front teeth.

"Yes, Willie, you'll be king of the menagerie," said Fred.

"Well, Mary, I shall have pet mice and rats, a pet pig and a peacock, a marmoset monkey and a mongoose, a pet hare and a hedgehog, pet bats and pet cats and cavies, an Arctic fox, a fretful porcupine, a prairie-dog and a genetta cat. And, Mary, they shall all live

together in unity and peace as happy as the summer days are long."

One day, leaving his room in a hurry, Fred quite forgot to put Willie in his cage.

So, after a few moments spent in thought, the bird must have said to himself:

"I wonder where master goes to every day.. Well, I shall find out at last—I shall follow him."

The window was down, and so out flew the starling, and he must have made his way along the roofs, content to simply keep his master well in view. At all events, in the humanity class-room that day a starling suddenly appeared, having come through the ventilator apparently.

It was a warm and comfortable class-room, the seats, like those in the gallery of a theatre, being arranged tier on tier above each other.

For a time, indeed till nearly the end of the hour, Willie's conduct was quite exemplary; for having very speedily disposed of the few flies that were on the panes of glass, he sat down quietly on the window-sill, as if listening to the translations of Juvenal. During these he never spoke, and the Latin professor, if he thought about the bird at all, naturally imagined it was a wild one that had entered for warmth.

This-gentleman was an Englishman, but had a strong affection for all things Scotch, above all for the poems of Burns. These he often read to the students.

To-day he said: "Now, Juvenal, you must stand aside and make way for a greater man. Gentlemen, I shall read you the poet's verses to a mountain daisy."

Mr. M.'s powers of elocution were highly appreciated by the students, and when he commenced to read one might have heard that traditional pin fall.

“Wee, modest, crimson-tipp'd flower,
Thou's met me in an evil hour;
For I maun crush amang the stoure
 Thy slender stem;
To spare thee now is past my pow'r,
 Thou bonnie gem!”

“Tse, tse, tse! Poo—oor Willie! Poo—oor, dear Willie!” said the starling.

The professor looked somewhat disconcerted, but went on with the reading:

“Cauld blew the bitter-biting north
Upon thy early, humble birth,
Yet cheerfully thou glinted forth
 Amid the storm,
Scarce rear'd above the parent-earth
 Thy tender form.”

“Bravo! Bravo! Tse, tse, tse!” cried Willie.

The students could no longer contain their mirth, and there was a chorus of laughing that made the ancient rafters ring. And in this Willie heartily joined, ending by shouting at the top of his voice, “You're a rascal, you are, you are, you ARE!”

The professor of humanity, bowing to Fate and the starling, closed the book, laughingly remarking that the bird, no matter to whom it belonged, seemed to have a far higher appreciation of the Scottish bard than many of the gentlemen there present.

But after this Fred took care that Willie was always safe in his cage before he left home of a morning.

It was at this same professor's table that Fred first met Archie Munro. They happened to sit side by side that evening at tea. There had been a few minutes of rather excited conversation, and almost a babble of tongues, then, as sometimes occurs under such circumstances, a sudden lull, during which Archie was heard distinctly to say as he looked into his cup: "Professor M—— *will* always spoil good tea by drowning it with milk!"

The students tittered.

"I'm sorry," said Mr. M——, "if your tea is not to your liking, Mr. Munro."

Archie was so confused for a few moments that Fred felt downright sorry for him. But he soon plucked up courage, for he was no coward.

"My dear professor," he said, coolly enough now, "the remark really wasn't meant for your ears. But now that I've said it I'll stick to it. Good tea needs but little milk."

"Well done, Munro," said the professor, laughing. "I like a lad who has the courage of his convictions. Will you send that tea away and have another cup, and I promise you I sha'n't offend again."

Fred and Archie found that their roads lay in the same direction for fully a mile. They found also that they had many thoughts and views of life in common, and parted at last with a warm shake of the hands and a promise to meet again.

This was the commencement of a friendship that lasted for a lifetime.

One Saturday forenoon, just as Fred had finished



FRED RECEIVES A VISIT FROM DONALD AND LILLY.

dressing and was preparing for a long botanical excursion up the Don from old Balgownie Brig, he heard the sound of a dog's footsteps coming upstairs at a canter. It couldn't be Darby. Darby was far too fat to run like that.

It was honest Torlath, and next minute he had dashed the door open. His fore-paws were on his master's shoulders, and he was positively whining and crying with excitement and pleasure as he lovingly licked Fred's ears and cheeks.

More footsteps on the stair, steadier and slower, and in due time, lo! Lilly appeared, looking like a veritable rosebud, so fresh and bonnie that Fred for a moment thought he could give up all his studies and even ambition, to get away with her once again down to the cool green country and his dear wild woods.

But she was not alone. No. For here was old Donald acting as her chaperon. He was dressed in his quaint and ancient Sunday's clothes, but with his long white hair and beard of snow he looked quite in keeping with his dress, and as Lilly and he, arm in arm, had walked up Union Street that day, many a passenger had stopped to gaze wonderingly after the pair.

"Oor dear laddie," said Donald, holding out both his hands. "It was my pension day, you see, and I thought I ought to bring Lilly with me to show her the ferlies (wonders), and here we are."

"Welcome as flowers in May," cried Fred, the tears of joy in his eyes. "Sit down, sir, take the chair next the fire. Lilly, you take that chair. I haven't a third,

but I can sit on the footstool beside Torlath—dear old Torlath!"

There was so much to talk about and so much to tell on both sides, that a whole hour wore away faster than they could have believed it possible.

Then old Donald went off to receive his quarterly pay at the barracks, promising to return at two o'clock to dine with them. Fred arranged for dinner with Mrs. Peel, and then out the sister and Fred sallied to see the great city of granite, and Torlath solemnly and soberly brought up the rear.

Lilly was delighted with all she saw. He took her to see the university buildings, both in Old and New Aberdeen. But I think she was most impressed with the snow-white walls of stately Marischal College.

With Union Street and King Street she was charmed, and her walk through the halls and galleries of the New Market, with its broad staircases and splendid fountains, put her in mind, she said, of something she had read in the *Arabian Nights Entertainments*.

Duncan, whose shop they visited, was taken aback at the fresh young beauty of Fred's sister, and was extra polite, while Mary called her "ma'am" every minute, though she still addressed her brother as Freddy.

She was shown all over the place, and much pleased she was with the beauty of some of the bird pets and their charming songs.

"Well, Freddy," said Duncan at last, "your sister bust hodour (honour) by back parlour with her presedce. Bri'g her id, Freddy, a'd Bary, by dear, rud a'd

fetch three bottles of spruce. Three, Bary, *three*. Dothi'g less will suit the occasiod."

Mrs. Peel had striven that day to make the dinner a success, and a success it was, the pudding being warmly praised by all.

"I don't know when I've made so hearty a meal," said old Donald after he had returned thanks.

Then Torlath had all that was left, and once more they drew round the fire to warm their toes and talk of home.

It was already dark when Fred saw his sister and Donald into the train, with Torlath safely ensconced beneath the seat. It would be darker ere they reached the distant station. But Sandie was to meet them with Captain Rowland's dog-cart, so they should soon get safely home.

Fred was still talking to Lilly, who was leaning laughingly over the window, when someone touched him on the shoulder, and, looking round, behold! his friend Archie Munro.

"But, I beg your pardon really, Fred, I did not notice that you were talking to anyone."

He lifted his cap as he spoke, and would have hurried away.

"No, no," cried Fred, detaining him, "you must not go. Lilly, dear, this is the best friend I have in Aberdeen, with the exception of Duncan. Mr. Archibald Munro. Archie, this is my sister Lilly."

Archie bowed again, and Lilly blushed.

"O, I can assure you, Miss Lilly, you are no stranger to me! We really never tire talking about

you and country life, and Fred has asked me to come and visit your mother some day. Yes, and I mean to accept the invitation too."

"You will find us living in a very humble mansion now, Mr. Munro. Since father's death all is changed."

"Never mind."

"No, sir; and I know mother will welcome Fred's friend."

"All in!" shouted the guard.

Whew—w—w— he whistled, and off went the train, the two students waving their handkerchiefs after it as long as it could be seen.





CHAPTER XXVI.

FRED STILL STRUGGLES ON.

ARCHIE MUNRO was a tall and very handsome youth about nineteen years of age, being thus two years senior to Fred. This disparity in years was not sufficiently great to militate against their becoming fast friends. Somehow they seemed cut out for each other. They had the same tastes as regards botany and natural history, or the love of nature "in all its shows and forms."

But Fred was probably the superior in intellectual capacity, and although he did not talk in quite such high *bon ton* as Archie, his sayings were infinitely more original, and even droll, I might add. As they strolled arm in arm away out the long Rubislaw or Skene Road on a Saturday forenoon, the elder used to positively hang on the words of the junior, and his hearty happy laugh, that rang out every now and again, told that Fred had made a hit of some kind. Thus encouraged, during their walks our hero used to be brimful of "daffin'" and fun, and Archie would permit him to do most of the talking. They were in the habit of going into small cottages by the roadside to indulge in ginger-beer, or crofters' houses to pur-

chase buttermilk or whey as drinks, and never was Archie better pleased than to listen to a set-to of badinage, betwixt his friend and some buxom country lassie with a clever tongue in her head. Not only he, but others around, would on such occasions have to laugh, till one after another had to double up like jack-knives to save their sides from splitting. For Fred possessed that happy knack in conversation which may be called the suggestive, and which draws out the opponent in repartee, and compels her or him to make clever answers, never for a moment suspecting that these are formulated in the mightier mind. A person like Fred, really has it in his power thus to make a veritable fool seem clever and feel clever.

So those rambles of Fred and his friend used to be very delightful indeed. Especially when the days got longer, and spring began to bring the gowans to the lea, the red tassels to the green and feathery larch, buds of down to the willows, and the song of birds to woods, to fields, and to the sky itself.

Sometimes, but not *very* often, Archie took tea with Fred. Not very often, for this reason: Archie, like Mrs. Peel, soon discovered that his friend was not only poor, but actually pinched at times. It was quite different with Archie. He was an only son, and his father, though not wealthy, owned the land he tilled, and was a gentleman even in the plebeian sense of the word, driving a capital dog-cart and going shooting whenever he had a mind to. His little estate was in the Mearns. But Archie insisted on Fred's often coming to his rooms in town.

And they were rooms too; a beautifully and tastefully furnished drawing-room and bed-room, on a first floor of one of the best houses in Union Street.

Archie played both violin and piano, and both instruments were in his rooms; and charmed indeed Fred used to be to sit and listen.

"I like you, Fred," said Archie once, wheeling round on the piano-stool, his frank face all aglow with pleasure. "I like you much for one thing."

"And what is that, *mon ami*?"

"Because you do not possess that questionable form of pride that Highlanders so often have, and which would deprive me of your much-desired company, simply because there is a trifling difference in our station of life."

"Thank you, Archie! I trust I am not envious, but it has preyed a little on my mind at times, I confess, to think I had no better place to ask you to than my gloomy wee attic."

"Ha, ha, ha! Give me a grip of your hard-working fist, old man. By Harry, Fred! if I were as clever as you—but there, it is I who am envious now. Only, had I been able to take even the thirteenth bursary, O, would not my mother have been delighted!"

That same evening Archie said: "By the by, Fred, I promised to take a book to-night to three students who live in one room in School Hill. Will you come?"

"Certainly."

Ten minutes afterwards they were trudging along towards School Hill. But it was not here exactly

that the three students lived, but up a lane or court that led off it.

"Now," said Archie as they neared the door, "you will see for yourself how some Highland students can live, and how hard they fight for their education. One of them is even a bursar—Duncan M'Connochie."

The house in which these poor but earnest lads lived, contained several families besides that of the old lady, who let one room to M'Connochie, his brother, and a cousin. Indeed, there was a family on each flat, and one below ground. Tradesmen chiefly, hard-working, and doubtless honest enough.

There was no light on the rickety staircase, however, which ascended from the end of the public passage. But Archie struggled up first, feeling every inch of the way with his cane, and Fred followed close behind him. Up, up, up to the third floor. And now Archie knocked at a door, from under which a bright light was streaming.

"Come in," shouted a voice in strong Celtic tones.

"Ah! is it yourself, Mister Munro? Sure you needn't have knocked at all, at all. It isn't a stranger you'd be making of yourself?"

"No, Duncan; and here is the copy of Tacitus I promised you. Keep it altogether. I have several other copies."

While these two students were talking Fred had time to look about him. It was indeed a strange room, and scant was the furniture therein. A bed stood in one corner, on which, under some Highland

plaids, were soundly sleeping Duncan's brother and cousin. The bed was too small for three.

"These two young rascals," said Duncan, "are as sound asleep as snakes in winter. At two o'clock I wake them and go to bed myself. I study till two, they retire at eight o'clock and begin their work when I rouse them. And a job it is, I can assure you. If they want any more sleep after this, why, they have to curl up before the fire."

The fire was of peats and wood. Indeed, quite a large stack of the former stood in a nook, and the wood was kept under the bed. One big deal table and a few rickety wooden chairs constituted all the furniture, with the exception of a corner cupboard crammed with very ordinary looking delf. Books *galore* lay about everywhere, and there was an old iron fender in front of the fire, on which reclined a bent and worn poker and a pair of tongs without a leg—to say half a pair of tongs would be better English.

There was also in this room a barrel with a lid on it, which contained oatmeal, and a barrel without a lid half full of red herrings.

I may here inform the English reader that this sketch is taken from the life, and that many a clergyman who now thunders from a Scottish pulpit has lived, when a student in Aberdeen, in quite as poor a way as this.

"Do they live," said Fred to Archie after they were once more safely downstairs, "do they live on herrings and oatmeal?"

"For the most part," replied Archie, "herrings, oatmeal, and milk. And they look well on it too."

"I sha'n't talk about being poor again," said Fred, "after what I have seen to-night."

Considering all things Fred got through his first session at the university very well indeed, and when he reached his mother's humble hillside cottage once more, he had more than one beautifully bound volume in his portmanteau, which he had won in competition.

Something of his old life was now recommenced. He could afford himself a few weeks of holidays, and he took them.

It was spring, the "briard" was growing green over the brown earth, the potatoes were peeping up through the drills, and Borlem was busy sowing turnips with a one-horse machine.

The hills were green, the gold was on the furze, the yellow tassels on the broom, fields were starred with daisies, and the bonnie Don meandered—a silver band—through wild woods thickening green.

Birds sang everywhere, the balmy but bracing air was filled with the hum of insect life, and light and love seemed to rule supreme o'er all the beautiful country.

Now in the pride of his youth, or call it if you like his young manhood, Fred determined that he would not be a burden to his mother and sister. He would pay for his board. Indeed, he had saved up to do so, during the winter months. It was a very laudable resolution, and he stuck to it.

Lilly and he were much together now. They roamed, as they used to do in the days that now appeared so far behind them, through moors and hills and woods, and, as of yore, they spent many an afternoon at old Donald's cottage. Torlath was their constant companion. Gael still hunted with Gilbert, and although they had been parted for quite six months, Koakie and the starling took to quarrelling and upbraiding each other from the first again.

Fred was never tired talking about his college life and his friend Archie Munro, and Lilly was never tired listening, for whatever interested her brother was of no small moment to her.

One day while sitting by the banks of the Don in earnest conversation, all about Archie, Captain Rowland appeared on the scene.

"What an interesting subject you two must be discussing!" he said, laughing. "Is it fish, Miss Lilly?"

"No, sir, not fish. Fred was telling me all about his dearest college friend, Archie Munro."

"Can *he* fish?" said the captain.

"O, yes, sir; many and many a basketful we brought home from the Don burn between us."

"All right then, Fred lad, my mind is made up!"

"I don't quite understand you, sir."

"Don't you? Well, I'm going to invite your friend and you both to stay with me for a couple of weeks at the Hall. Ah, Miss Lilly! don't let your sweet face fall. You will see your brother every day, and you can join us in our rambles and in our fishing exploits."

"Wowff-wow!" cried Torlath.

“Yes, Torlath, you may come also.”

So here began a new act in the drama of our hero's life.

Archie was delighted to come to the Hall, and he was often at the cottage too. Captain Rowland was quite as good as his word, and they never went anywhere without Lilly.

Archie proved himself a capital fisherman, and was a merry-hearted, capital companion also. What a happy, happy time that was, to be sure, for these three young people! and when the fortnight came to an end at last, the captain told his guests they must stay three weeks longer, after which, he and his wife were leaving for Norway.

Three weeks! Why, it did not seem like three days, so pleasantly did the time speed away.

Ah! but

“pleasures are like poppies spread,
You seize the flow'r, its bloom is shed;
Or like the snow falls in the river,
A moment white, then melts for ever.”

When bidding Lilly good-bye at her cottage door, Archie held her hand in his a moment longer perhaps than there was any necessity to do, then he murmured a half-whispered but fond “Adieu!”

Poor Lilly went into the cottage to cry.

The weeks rolled by and the corn began to turn yellow in the fields; then Fred one day took a bundle on his back and a stick in his hand, and journeyed away to a distant part of the country, fully thirty

miles from his mother's cottage. Both Lilly and Mrs. Hallam had tried to dissuade the lad from his purpose, but all in vain.

He had started at early dawn, just as the blackbirds were shaking the dew from their wings, and about sunset, hungry, hipped, and weary, he approached a large blue-slated farm-steading.

Yes, Mr. Thomas was at home and he could see him. The interview was very brief. Fred told him at once who he was and what he wanted. A poor student willing to do harvest work as scytheman, in order to earn a little money to help him through next winter session.

Mr. Thomas was a kindly-disposed man, and seeing that Fred was sturdy, manly, and strong, he gladly hired him. On one condition, however, namely, that he should have his meals with the family and not among the servants. After demurring a little to this arrangement, Fred consented. And the very next day saw him wielding a scythe in the harvest field, with a pretty buxom lassie gathering the oats that he laid low.

There were three scythemen besides Fred; but the student had taken the lead and he meant to keep it, and did, through all the harvest. He was terribly tired the first night, but this feeling of fatigue wore away day by day, till at last corn-cutting felt to him like mere child's play.

How his droll anecdotes and witty conversation did make everybody laugh, to be sure! He was really the life of the whole field, and Annie, the innocent lassie who gathered to him, thought nothing of telling her

female companions, that she was head over heels in love with the young and handsome first scytheman.

"Klyak" day came at last, and great was the laughing and fun at taking klyak. This, I may mention for the benefit of my English readers, is the cutting of the last sheaf of oats. There very often is a hare that starts out when the scythes come near the end. On this occasion it was so arranged that the last patch to be cut was isolated right in the centre of the field. This was to give the collie dogs a chance to catch the hare if there should be one.

Nearer and nearer come the scythes, smaller and smaller becomes the patch, then all at once there is a wild chorus of shouting, laughing, and screaming as out pops the klyak hare and starts for the nearest cover.

"Go on, good dogs. Bravo, Coolin! Bravo, Meg! He has her! No, *she* has her. No, no; neither has got her, and the klyak hare is safe in the woods."

Back come the dogs panting, with their red ribbons of tongues dangling out at the sides of their frothy mouths, and it was generally agreed there and then that the hare had been a witch, and that if the dogs had caught her she would have changed herself into an old hag, and ridden away over the woods on a broom-stick.

Then down came the last handful, and Fred, with bonnie Annie's assistance, arranged it into a pretty little sheaf called the klyak sheaf, and this would hang in the farmer's hall till Christmas morning, and then be put out for the birds to eat.

Next night the klyak ball came off, and, as in duty bound, Fred danced the first reel with Annie. Yes, and many another reel as well, and it was far past the

“Wee short hour ayont the twal”

before the dancing ceased, and the fiddlers played “God Save the Queen!”.

When the last rick was thatched and even the rakings housed, then Fred left this honest farmer’s family with many regrets. He put the money in his little purse, bade them all good-bye, shouldered his bundle, clutched his stick, and set out once more for his distant home.

Poor Annie! she was in tears; Fred gave her a blue ribbon, and he gave her—yes, he gave her a kiss, and so they parted, never more to meet again.

Aberdeen and the university once again. Red gowns thronging the streets, snow on the ground, and many a snowball whizzing past the students’ heads, or finding a billet on their backs, for in the Granite City students are considered the legitimate game of the street arabs or gutter-snipes.

Archie was delighted to see his friend once more, and so was Mrs. Peel.

So Fred soon settled down to hard work, and harder it would be this session than last. To add somewhat to his scanty store of money, he undertook to teach the only son of a widow lady who lived in the suburbs. Two hours each night for five shillings a week.

A more irreclaimable young dunderhead than this

spoiled boy never lived. At the end of a fortnight Fred lost his patience and his temper, boxed the urchin's ears, and gave up his situation.

It was well, as it turned out, that he had done so, for he would need all the time at his disposal, having determined to compete at the end of the session for a Greek bursary of the value of thirty pounds to be held for two years.

If he should be successful then indeed he might look forward to a bright and happy future. So at least he thought.

Ah, but his income was small and his purse was wondrous light!

Then there were so many things to be purchased in the shape of food, firing, books, and clothes.

No one could have called the lad mercenary, yet often and often, when long past midnight, he sat planning and planning how best to make his little store go farthest.

He studied hard now, and burned much midnight oil.

Fred Hallam was a queer boy, and it did not take much to elevate him or to make his heart beat high with hope. For example, he found some verses one evening in an old magazine, and these he cut out, pasted on a card, and hung above the fireplace in his lonely attic.

They read as follows, and really they were many times and oft a source of considerable comfort to him:—

"Every wise observer knows,
Every watchful gazer sees,

Nothing grand or beautiful grows,
Save by gradual slow degrees.
Ye who toil with a purpose high,
And fondly the proud result await,
Murmur not, as the hours go by,
That the season is long and the harvest late.
Remember that brotherhood strong and true,
Builders and artists and bards sublime,
Who lived in the past and worked like you,
Worked and waited a weary time.
Dark and cheerless and long their night;
Yet they patiently toiled at the task begun,
Till, lo! through the clouds broke the morning light,
Which shines on the soul when success is won."





CHAPTER XXVII.

“NOW, GREEK MEETS GREEK”—THE ONE BLANK LINE!—
NATURE’S PENALTY—HIS LIFE WAS EBBING FAST
AWAY.

AS the winter wore away poor Fred Hallam found himself more and more pinched to get “ends to meet,” as the phrase runs.

But every Friday morning came a box from home. This really was a godsend to the struggling student, and, albeit he knew that his mother and Lilly could ill spare this weekly gift of good things, he dared not refuse to accept it.

That box was packed by loving, thoughtful hands, and contained over and above the butter, eggs, potatoes, and delicious oatcakes, many little odds and ends to prove to him that the dear ones at home did not forget him. It might be a pair of mits knitted by Lilly, or a pair of warm socks that Jeannie had “shanked,” or a comforter made by his mother. And there was always a bunch of some sort of wild flowers, greenery or grasses, that, Lilly judged aright, would keep him in mind of the bonnie woods and glens around his country home.

Then in the box there were always four letters, one

each from Mrs. Hallam, Lilly, Jeannie, and Borlem. In Lilly's, of course, his pets, Torlath, Gilbert, Gael, and Koakie, were made to send all kind of funny messages, and describe the wild adventures they had by bank and brae.

So Friday afternoon was always a happy time with Fred.

As often as not Archie Munro would be there when Mrs. Peel came in, puffing and blowing a little, with the wonderful box, but smiling all over her old-fashioned rosy face. The two lads—I suppose I really ought to call them young men—then set about undoing the string. No, Fred would not have it cut; the string would do again. Then the contents were exposed one by one, and the letters read, for these two trusty friends had no secrets from each other.

Very often there would be a little parcel for Mrs. Peel herself, for Fred's mother was certainly not ungrateful to her for being so kind to her boy.

Archie marked with growing concern, the somewhat pinched expression his friend's face had assumed towards the close of the session, and the anxious weary look about his eyes. Well he knew the cause of it too. It was not altogether study that made Fred look so. Gladly would Archie have helped him out of his own abundance, for his father supplied him with plenty of pocket-money, and never looked at the items in his monthly bills. Yes, Archie would have helped him, but he feared to offend Fred's Scotch pride and independence. So he refrained.

But he often invited his friend to dinner. This

courtesy could hardly be objected to, especially when Archie used so much tact.

"Why, Fred," he would say one day, "you are studying a great deal too hard. Bother the Greek bursary, I say, if it is going to

'Steal the roses frae your cheeks
The blythe blink frae your ee,'

as the song says! You want relaxation and recreation and all sorts of things. Come and have pot-luck with me to-night, and we'll go to the concert afterwards."

"I can't afford the concert, Archie."

"Ah, but, my fine fellow, look, I have the tickets! And I didn't pay for them either."

This was true enough, but Mr. Munro, senior, had paid for them.

"Very well," Fred would say.

And an outing like this never failed to put some life in him.

A night or two after this, perhaps, Archie would come up to Fred's room and pretend to be very much out of sorts.

"Why, what is up?" Fred would say; "you look like a dying duck, Archie."

"Got the blues again. All the world looks to me as cheerless as a winter midnight."

"But you can go home and play your fiddle or piano. Won't that cheer you up?"

"What, playing all alone, or playing to Mary, the pet rat you gave me! No, I like the beastie well enough; but I'd rather play to you, Fred. Come along.

Take pity on a poor old man. Leave those everlasting books. Be charitable, and take supper with me."

But as the time drew near for the competition, nothing on earth could have persuaded Fred to lay aside his everlasting books, and if Archie came up to his room he had a magazine or newspaper thrust into his hands, and was told to sit down quietly and read like a good little boy, and not disturb his elder brother.

Mrs. Peel did all she could to "feed her student laddie up"—the expression is her own—and seldom was there a pudding absent from Fred's dinner-table, but always with a little bit taken out, and Mrs. Peel alone knew how many eggs and how much cream had been used to make those tasty dishes. If Fred left any of his pudding,

"Weel, laddie," Mrs. Peel would say, "it is a pity to have to throw that nice bit into the ash-bin, for mony a peer (poor) craytur would be glad o't."

So, to please her, Fred usually tried to make a good dinner.

The Greek professor, a tall and stately man of middle age, to listen to whom was a treat as the thunder-lines of Homer rolled sonorously from his lips, was very fond of Fred. He overtook the lad one morning as he was entering the quad and took him by the elbow.

"It will be soon now," he said.

"What will soon be, sir?"

"The meeting of Greek with Greek, the tug of war, the battle of brains. You compete, don't you?"

"I do, sir."

"Well, you'll have three against you, but I mustn't

tell you who they are. Only don't you study too hard the last week. I've given the same advice to the others. Besides, your biceps, I can feel, has got more flabby of late, and your face is more pale. Health, boy, is before everything, and better even than a Greek bursary. Good-day! Take a rest."

Now Fred did a very wise thing; indeed I myself have often done the same, and can recommend the practice as eminently useful. For the whole of the day preceding the competition he did nothing, and did it well. That was the wise thing.

So on the morning of that eventful day he entered the class-room set apart for the competitors with a light heart and a fresh memory. The others confessed afterwards that they had been reading till two or three in the morning, and then tried almost in vain to snatch a few hours' refreshing sleep.

There were four young men sat down altogether. The tasks set them to do were certainly no child's play, and no lexicons were allowed.

A hasty glance at the papers told Fred that he could work them nearly all out, and do them well. He must beware, however, of making anything like a paraphrase of his translations. He had a good deal of poetry in his nature, and the temptation to improve upon the diction of ancient authors was sometimes very strong within him.

So the day went on, and the work went merrily on. The professor himself had sat reading at his desk all the forenoon, but went to lunch at one o'clock, his post being taken by another.

Fred now snatched a hasty repast. Only a bite or two of bread and cheese and a drop of tea from a bottle. He was afraid to eat much lest it should blunt his memory and render him drowsy.

At two back came the Greek professor, and shortly after two of the competitors took their hats and marched upstairs and away.

They gave in no papers.

So now it was man to man. Fred Hallam against O'Callaghan Grant.

They looked towards each other, smiled and nodded in a kindly way.

The professor noted this and seemed much pleased, and could not help addressing them, though but in few words: "Gentlemen, work away," he said, "you doubtless both experience

"The stern joy that warriors feel
In foemen worthy of their steel."

It still wanted an hour of the time when the papers must be given in, when, to his horror, Fred came upon a phrase which he could not translate. He puzzled over it for a time. He scratched his head, he knit his brows, he bit his pen, but all in vain.

"Never mind," he said to himself, "I'll finish the rest, and by that time the meaning will occur to me."

He left one blank line and hurried on, and in ten minutes' time had completed the work. He now read all over twice or thrice and corrected his copy.

But without that awful line his labour would be all in vain.

He tried, and tried, and tried again, without result.

His head grew dizzy. He felt faint, and the sweat poured out of his body at every pore.

Pale as a corpse he staggered down the centre steps.

“ You’re not going, Mr. Hallam ? ” said the professor uneasily.

“ No, sir, I feel a little queer, and am merely going to have a draught of water.”

Back to his seat again. One more trial.

Another and another.

He thought of Bruce and the spider, and went at it again.

But for once the dead warrior refused his assistance, and poor Fred was in despair.

Then a happy thought occurred to him—at least, however, it was but a forlorn hope.

He stood up in his seat and addressed the professor. “ You will call time, sir, a quarter before the hour ? ” he asked.

“ I will, Mr. Hallam.”

“ Call aloud then, sir, please, for I may fall asleep.” The worthy professor was not a little surprised at what he heard, but still more astonished when he saw Fred roll himself from head to foot in his Highland plaid and stretch himself at full length on the bench.

He did sleep, strange as it may seem, and the sound of his regular breathing was heard high over the scratching of O’Callaghan Grant’s pen.

“ Gentlemen,” came the call at last, “ it wants but fifteen minutes of the hour.”

Fred half arose, but lay back again still and quiet for fully five minutes.

O'Callaghan Grant was only human, and he inwardly hoped that Fred Hallam had gone sound asleep again.

The professor, too, felt uneasy.

But suddenly up sprang our hero with a shout. "*Eureka!*" he cried, "*Habeo, Habeo* (I have it—I have it!)."

That shout seemed the death-knell to O'Callaghan Grant's hopes of success.

Nature had triumphed. During that few minutes' repose the blood had left the fretful brain, and memory had once more resumed her seat.

Rapidly enough did Fred's pen now go scratching across that blank line, and his work was done.

For a few minutes he leaned his face upon his hands, and his hands on the desk above his papers.

Can you guess, reader, what he was engaged in?

"Time, gentlemen, time!"

Both young men folded their papers, and, descending the steps, handed them in.

The day's trial was over; but who had won?

Another long weary twenty-four hours must elapse before the decision could be announced, and one-half of that time Fred spent with his friend Archie.

At the time appointed both went hurrying away towards the university.

But they were late, and some time before they reached the gates the result of the competition had been duly announced.

That result was a sad one for somebody.

That somebody was O'Callaghan Grant. They met

him hurrying homewards looking pale and woe-begone.

Though on the other side of the street, however, he boldly crossed, and holding out his hand warmly and generously shook that of the victor—Fred Hallam. But he dared not speak, and Archie noted, if Fred did not, that the tears were almost choking him.

On they went again, joyously excited, till, near the gates of the university buildings, they met a whole crowd of students. Hardly a crowd either, for they marched four deep, and were headed by a student with a cornet playing loudly, if not well,

“See the conquering hero comes!”

“Shoulder-high, lads, shoulder-high!” shouted the commander of this scarlet-gowned regiment.

And shoulder-high Fred was mounted, *nolens volens*, and not only carried three times round the quad, but up to the very door of the room where the professors were waiting to congratulate him.

I ought perhaps to close this chapter here, but I have something sad to say, and sadness not being much in my line I must hurry over it.

There is a law, then, in nature which demands for every period of excess a just retribution. None can trifle with her laws and hope to escape the penalty. I do not blame Fred for his ambition. He achieved a noble success; but the question was whether he did not buy it somewhat dearly.

Strong and hardy though he was, that burning of

the midnight oil had weakened his frame and impoverished his blood, and the subsequent excitement and worry of brain completed his discomfiture from a health point of view.

On the very morning after his victory he awoke from a dreamful uneasy sleep with a painful racking headache. He tried to rise, but fell feebly back on his pillow again.

Mrs. Peel was alarmed.

She tried her best to ease his anguish, by placing handkerchiefs wetted with water and vinegar across his brow, but all in vain.

His face was flushed, his head rolled uneasily to and fro, he felt burning all over, and tossed his arms about over the coverlet of the bed. So she sent at once for Archie. He, she thought, would know best what to do.

“Poor Fred!” said his friend as he entered.

Fred looked up and smiled feebly with lips alone, and his eyes had a strange sparkle in them that Archie did not half like.

“Dear old boy, I fear you’re ill. You must have overdone that midnight-oil business, lad.”

“I’m all right,” said Fred slowly; “but do, like a good fellow, undo this chain they have bound my head with, and take poor Torlath off my chest. I love the dog, but he is heavy—heavy.”

He closed his eyes and lay for a time unconscious.

Archie drew Mrs. Peel silently away out of the room.

“He is very ill,” he told her; “you had better send at once for Dr. P——.”

In less than an hour the carriage of the cleverest

surgeon-physician in the city rolled up to the door, and its owner slowly ascended the stairs.

He stopped to ask a few questions at Archie and at Mrs. Peel, then nodded his head and passed into Fred's attic.

The case was diagnosed at once as brain fever, the temperature taken, and the pulse examined. Then the kindly doctor wrote a prescription or two, gave instructions to Mrs. Peel, and enjoining perfect quiet prepared to take his leave.

He signalled to Archie to come with him.

"You are the lad's companion and friend, are you not?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, I know where you live. Jump in with me and I'll take you to the post-office, and thence home."

"Why to the post-office, sir?"

"To telegraph for the poor boy's relatives. They must nurse him *during* his illness."

"And back to health?"

"I did not say that."

"You think he is *very* ill then?"

"I hardly think he can pull through."

Archie's face fell. It seemed as if a cold, cold hand were clutching at his heart.

The doctor noted these signs of grief, and made haste to give some hope.

"Come, come," he said, "your friend *may* live, you know, and you must not let down your heart, considering how *very* useful you may be to him."

Lilly happened to be working at the flower-borders

of the little garden at Mavisbank when that terrible telegram came in.

She was singing to herself as she worked; very happy at heart, for on the previous evening another telegram had arrived announcing her brother's glorious victory.

And now—what could this one mean? She hurriedly tore it open. It was from Archie, and they—her mother and she—must hurry up to town as Fred was not very well.

Yes it was a softly-worded message, but Lilly could read between the lines.

That very night they arrived at Mrs. Peel's door in a cab.

"O, is my boy alive?"

These were the half-frantic mother's first words.

He was alive, but he knew no one. He was in a busy, busy, and somewhat noisy delirium.

Archie beckoned them away, and showed them into the room they were to occupy. Then he laid down the law gently but firmly.

"The only hope for Fred," he said, "lies in your being perfectly calm. The doctor says so, and he says that if you cannot be calm he must let you go home, and hire a nurse from the hospital."

"We promise," was all the answer they could vouchsafe; and after they had cried for a little while both appeared more settled, and Archie's hopes rose considerably.

For days and days Fred raved on unconscious, then quietness came. Alas! it was the quietness that in so

many cases of this sort ushers in the dark night of death.

A few nights after this the student was at his lowest.
His life seemed ebbing fast away.

The surgeon-physician took his mother away out of the room, and tried his best to comfort her, for Dr. P—— was a gentle-hearted man.

“Will it be long?” she sobbed.

“It is only a matter of a few hours,” was the reply.

All sat up that night; even Mrs. Peel. And you could not have heard a sound in the room, for the sleeper’s sleep was a silent one. His breathing was all but inaudible.

Fred’s life was trembling in the balance.

How did he himself feel just then? Or did he feel at all? He did feel for the first time since he had been struck down. Not pain, though, but pleasure.

He did not seem to be reclining on his little attic bed at all. He was wandering through his own wild woods, and by the banks of the winding Don. It was early summer, gentle winds were whispering through the trees, linnets sang as they perched near their nests among the sweetly-scented golden furze.

“While mavis in wooded glens
Made echo ring from tree to tree.”

His dogs were with him gambolling merrily through the green of the heather, and with them he wandered on and on till he came to the banks of a clear and rippling stream. Deep down in a pool he could see the minnows in shoals, basking in the rays of the soft warm sunshine.

How lovely the water looked!

And he was thirsty, O, so thirsty!

He would bend down and drink a long delicious draught. But, lo! the water receded from his touch. Again and again he tried, but tried in vain.

“Water, water!” he murmured half aloud.

Then his head and shoulders were gently raised by Archie, and he opened his eyes.

What could have happened? Where was he? He gazed about him bewildered—dazed. Was not that his mother, and yonder red-eyed girl looked strangely like Lilly.

“Is it—is it you, Archie?”

“Yes, my dear boy. And glad we are to hear you talk again. Drink, Fred, drink.”

Fred drank.

Then he held out one lean white hand, which Lilly took and cried over.

But Fred slept on unconscious.

Ah! but a happy smile illumined the doctor’s face, when he arrived at ten that morning and felt his patient’s brow.

“Youth has conquered,” he said. “Now all he needs is nourishment and quiet, *absolute* quiet and rest.”

Yes, youth had conquered. And from that very day the student began to mend.

It was weeks, however, before he could be removed to Mavisbank, but after that he got speedily well. Perhaps the thoughts of his recent success at the university had much to do with his quick recovery.

When well enough he and Archie once more received

an invitation to spend a few weeks at the Hall, and so the dear old times seemed all to have come back again—the rambles among the woods and over the hills, bird-nesting and botanical excursions, hunting for specimens in moorland or field, days spent fishing by the banks of the Don or Kelpie Burn, and visits to many an old castle ruin, the home of jackdaw, cushat, or owl.

“Archie,” said Fred one day, “and you, Lilly, listen—”

“What wonderful remark are you going to make, Fred?” said Lilly.

“Hush, you little rogue! I was merely going to say that I feel happier now than ever I did in my life; and I do think that a terrible illness, if it does not purify the blood, purifies the soul.”

“Well, Fred, we are happy too,” said Archie; “at least I am. Ah! I do believe we’ll look back to those days yet with regret.”

“Wowff-wow-wow!” This from saucy Torlath.

“See,” cried Fred laughing, “that honest dog, if he could but speak, would tell us to enjoy the present, and take no heed for to-morrow.”

And so they rambled, laughing, on.



CHAPTER XXVIII.

JUST LIKE OLD TIMES—HOW SANDIE WOOED JEANNIE— THE DREAM OF A LIFE COMES TRUE.

WITH his great and, one might say, marvellous success in the competition for the Greek bursary, Fred's struggles were virtually at an end. The greater part of them at all events.

He was now beyond the pale of actual want, and, proud thought! he had secured his independence by his own almost unaided exertions.

“To him who hath much more shall be given,” we are told in Holy Writ. This was exemplified in Fred's case. For offer after offer poured in for his services in private tuition, and some of these he accepted for the next session. He took care, however, to select pupils who were of some age, who were not spoiled brats, nor the only sons of widows.

In fact, most of his pupils next session, and on subsequent sessions, were young men who needed assistance to help them to pass various examinations. So that Fred became what is called in England “a coach.” However, his work was fairly well paid for. He was rich enough now to have taken far better lodgings, but somehow the little attic, in which he had lived so

long and toiled so hard, had a charm for him that no other room could have possessed.

Besides, what landlady in all the Granite City could have equalled kindly Mrs. Peel?

But as he received pupils in his garret, as the lads irreverently called it, he took some pains to furnish it, and garret though it was, it really looked very cheerful when the gas was lit.

Two years passed by. Fred had taken his degree with honours. Archie, too, was Master of Arts (M.A.). But while Fred was studying divinity, Archie was travelling on the Continent; and when he had stayed long enough there to acquire what his father considered polish, he was ordered home, and appeared one fine summer's day at the little cottage of Mavisbank.

He came up the garden path whistling as was his wont, and looking as cool as if he had not been a whole year absent.

But he greeted Lilly most joyfully, and her eyes were sparkling, and a double dash of rose bloom appeared on her cheeks, as soon as he was ushered into the little parlour.

Mrs. Hallam and Fred were equally glad to welcome the rover back.

That evening, as they sat at tea in the garden arbour, it was arranged that next day they should visit the old castle of B——. Mrs. Hallam was, of course, invited.

"No, dear," she said with a smile. "I'm not so young as I was. I'll send Torlath and Gael to take my place."

The day was charming, and those young folks were as light of heart as the laverocks that sang so high in the himmel blue.

They spread their luncheon on the grass in the principal hall of the old castle, and Fred went off to a distant red-ore well to fetch some water. Then Gael invited Torlath down to the donjon keep, where long ago he had enjoyed such good sport among the rats.

So Archie and Lilly were left alone.

She was toying with some wild flowers.

He was looking earnestly at her.

Archie Munro was a bold, outspoken youth.

Suddenly he said:

“Lilly, Lilly dear.”

She looked up now, blushing a little, but all the prettier for it.

“Lilly, dearest,” he continued. “Yes, that is better. I’ve been wandering all over Europe trying to forget you, and—I can’t. I want you to be my wife. Will you?”

For the simple reason that this is not a love story, I shall not tell you what Lilly replied.

Enough for me to say that when Fred returned with the red-ore water, Archie sprang up and grasped his hand and spoke just one word. That word was, Brother!

I am getting to the end of this story of independent toil and struggle, and I am not the one to keep the curtain up one moment longer than is necessary. Lilly and Archie were married then. They are living

now at one of the prettiest old-fashioned mansions in Mearns. And though I say it, who perhaps ought not to say it, I believe Archie might have searched the wide world over and not found a sweeter wee wife than Lilly makes him.

Every summer even yet Fred goes to spend a week or two with his sister and brother, and then they all set out together on a long walking tour.

But I must tell you something about Sandie and Jeannie. You see I class their names together for reasons that will presently be understood.

Every evening, then, for a fortnight at the least, on a certain summer not long after Fred had commenced the study of divinity, it was observed that the "craigit heron" went hopping or running, or running and hopping, time about, from the Hall to the back kitchen-door of Mavisbank. And this is almost equivalent to saying that Sandie was there too. Anyhow he was.

This sturdy young ploughman, it would seem, had made up his mind to enter into the bonds of wedlock, and had come to the conclusion, that innocent Jeannie would make him as good a wife as any other girl in the parish.

But Sandie's courtship was far from being a very romantic one.

To wit: Jeannie would have finished her day's work, even to the milking of the cows, and started "shanking" (knitting) a stocking before Sandie lifted the door "sneck" and quietly entered. Then down the pair would sit by the kitchen-fire—even although the night was warm—he in one corner, she in the other,

with that droll heron asleep on one leg betwixt the two.

For the whole of the first week Sandie's suit could not be said to have made a surprising deal of progress, for the simple reason that he could find nothing more entertaining to talk about than the weather, the crops, first shifts and second shifts, colts, sheep, pigs, and polled cattle.

About the beginning of the second it advanced a stride, for Sandie gave Jeannie little bits of neighbourly gossip—told her, for instance, that the miller's servant lassie had got a new bonnet, and electrified her by the news that Mains o' Drummie's eldest daughter had got a piano, and so on and so forth.

But towards the end of the fortnight one evening, after looking a long time into the fire, Sandie ventured upon the following question:

"Do ye like me a wee bit, Jeannie?"

"Pooh!" said Jeannie, knitting away like everything. "I like ye weel eno' for that matter."

"Cause, Jeannie," added Sandie, "I have a terrible notion o' *you*."

Jeannie did not speak, but the wires went faster than ever, with a clickety-click and a clickety-clickety-click.

"What would ye dae," said Sandie, "if I were to ask ye to mairry me?"

"Fling the dish-clout at your lug," quoth Jeannie.

There was no more to be got out of Jeannie that night. So with a bit of a sigh Sandie took his leave, and the heron and he went back to the Hall. He thought over the situation and dreamt over it, and at

long last made up his mind to carry Jeannie by storm and stratagem.

So on the Tuesday following he induced her to go for a walk with him.

Innocent Jeannie naturally thought the walk meant a stroll by the river's bank; but Sandie, somehow, ere long found himself close to the minister's house.

"I've a bit o' business wi' the parson, Jeannie. Would ye come in wi' me and wait a wee?"

"O aye!" said Jeannie, "I can dae that."

They were shown into the library, and presently in came the minister, and at once Sandie opened his strongest batteries and commenced firing.

"We've come, sir," said Sandie, "to ask you to have us 'cried' in the kirk three times and then to mairry—"

"But—but—but—" cried Jeannie, her face terribly red.

"One at a time, my dear," said the minister, waving his hand.

"To mairry us!" exclaimed Sandie with imposing emphasis.

"O sir, sir!" began Jeannie.

"Tak' nae notice o' her, sir," said Sandie; "she is just *brunt* (burned) wi' shyness."

"I shall be very glad to marry you," said the aged minister. "You seem cut out for each other, and you bear excellent characters. Good-night! May Heaven bless you, my children!"

And before Jeannie could make a single remark both stood outside the door in the gloamin' of the lovely summer's evening.

"O Sandie, Sandie!" said Jeannie.

"O Jeannie, Jeannie!" said Sandie.

And that was about all they did say till they found themselves back at Mavisbank. And if Sandie's craigit heron's heart was lighter than his master's as it followed him home that night, it must have been a very happy bird indeed.

.

"We have seen a change and many a change,
Faces and footsteps and all things strange."

So sang the poet's birds; and so they might have sung had they come back to Drumdale' parish and vicinity three years after the date of Jeannie's marriage. And the greatest change lay in the facts that the goodly old white-haired minister who had married that innocent couple had been gathered to his fathers, and the Rev. Frederick Hallam reigned in his stead.

No less than seven clergymen of the Church of Scotland had been put up for the parish, and preached before the people Sabbath after Sabbath for some weeks.

But our friend Fred carried the day, and this, *entre nous*, might have been due in some slight measure to the influence of the big laird Captain Rowland.

Be this as it may, it was universally admitted that the young minister was a powerful preacher. During his trial sermon his strategic allusion to their old pastor, who had gone to a better world, brought tears to the eyes of every one in the church. It was a bit of fine oratory, and it told its tale and had its effect.

Another change was this: faithful Torlath and Gael as well had gone the way all dogs have to go. But not only were Koakie and Willie alive and well, and as impudent as ever at the time of the young pastor's induction, but Gilbert Bruce also.

Sandie and Jeannie had taken the little croft of Mavisbank, and were doing well therein, while Borlem had been installed at the manse as the minister's coachman.

Old Donald, though bordering on ninety, walked twice a day to the kirk to hear "our laddie" preach.

And Fred—I must still call him Fred—will allow that aged man to sit nowhere else save in the ministerial pew, where his mother—the dream of her life has at length come ~~true~~—may be seen sitting, Sabbath after Sabbath, listening with rapt attention to the eloquence of her son.

It was but a few Sundays ago that I myself sat beside her there, and after we were out and waiting for Fred, she turned to me and said, with tears of joy on her eyelashes: "O, sir, wasn't my boy grand to-day?"

"Yes, Mrs. Hallam," I frankly admitted; "and I can never look on your boy's bold and handsome face without being reminded of that glorious virtue self-reliance."



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Lucy's Christmas-Box.

